Commentary
February 1998

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Francis Fukuyama

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Feminizing Jewish Studies
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Does Lincoln Center Still Matter?
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Books in Review
Robert S. Wistrich • Gabriel Schoenfeld • David Brooks
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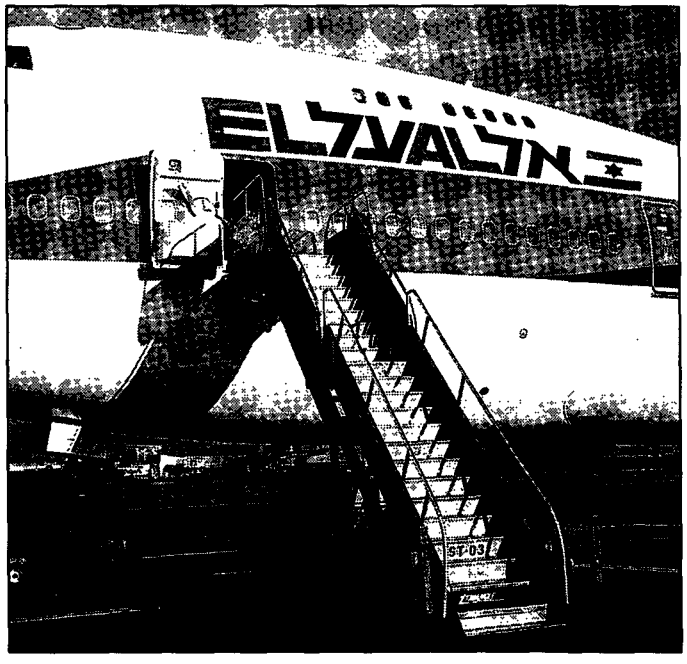

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Commentary
February 1998

Letters from Readers

The Role of Government

To the Editor:

"What Good Is Government?" by William J. Bennett and John J. DiIulio, Jr. [November 1997] starts off promisingly enough, with a presumably rhetorical title and a recap of the depressing slowdown of the conservative "revolution." But more depressing still is their prescription: Big Government is here to stay, so, apparently in the interest of political viability, efforts to dismantle it should be abandoned.

But to say that the public demands a titanic government and leave it at that is baffling. The proper question for conservatives to ask is not, "Do the people want it?," but rather, "Are the people wise to want it?," and, even more importantly, "Are the people right in wanting it?" The goal of political activity is to implement one's favored policies (or lack thereof); it is not to reach concord with the will of the people, but to shape it. That is why we involve ourselves in politics in the first place: the people are not always right.

Furthermore, I doubt that there are very many conservatives out there (though perhaps there are a few million liberals) who would agree with Messrs. Bennett and DiIulio's pronouncement that "the national government's post-New Deal role . . . in itself is not the problem," the real problem is mismanagement and a failure to perform in the "public interest." Really? So a socialist nanny state redistributing our wealth and taking away our liberties is just peachy, as long as it does so efficiently? I for one prefer my tyrants inept.

Public distrust of government may wound our pride in our chosen system, but many of the founding fathers whom it is so popular to cite thought it healthy, the price of liberty being eternal vigilance and so forth. The question is: with which government would Washington, Jefferson, Madison, and the rest be more familiar and more comfortable: the libertarian model, protecting freedom, basic rights, and borders, or Messrs. Bennett and DiIulio's enormous but nebulously "limited" government? The public owes the government precisely as much allegiance and respect as it has earned, and right now, that is not a lot.

The sad part is that retreat is not even necessary (laying aside the issue of whether it is ever desirable when principle is at stake). Granted there have been setbacks, but rather than concocting strategies for capitulation, minds of the authors' caliber ought to be conceiving ways to guide the electorate toward smaller government and regain momentum for conservatism (e.g., one-term term limits or the elimination of the withholding tax).

We are a few hundred miles outside Baghdad, and Messrs. Bennett and DiIulio would have us stop the tanks. Cutting one's losses can be a wise strategy, but the concept of cutting one's gains is new to me.

Michael Fransella
Williams Free Press
Williams College
Williamstown, Massachusetts

To the Editor:

The timely article, "What Good Is Government?," by William J. Bennett and John J. DiIulio, Jr. makes the crucial distinction between the "mindless expansion" of government and the good and essential functions of government envisioned by the men in Philadelphia.

In arguing the conservative case for an active American government, they reflect the classical wisdom of philosophers from Aristotle and Thucydides onward. Were it not for the state, said Saint Augustine, "men would devour one another

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as fishes." Martin Luther wrote that the primary function of the state is to protect its people from evildoers. Both emphasized the state's responsibility to ensure order and justice. And, of course, James Madison weighs in with his Niebuhrian understanding of evil and original sin: "If men were angels, no government would be necessary."

Men are neither fish nor angels, but humans "endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights . . . Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness."

Liberals trivialize government by failing to recognize its limits. Conservatives trivialize it by failing to acknowledge its essential contribution to the security and enrichment of its citizens.

If conservatives understand these truths and act on them, America—its people and government—might still become Lincoln's "last, best hope of earth."

ERNEST W. LEFEVER
Chevy Chase, Maryland

WILLIAM J. BENNETT and JOHN J. DIIULIO, JR. write:

Michael Fransella's main assertions are that though the American people are "not always right," they are always right to distrust government; that the "tanks" of reform are already outside the capital; and that the founding fathers would not want the anti-government troops to "retreat" when victory is in sight.

Mr. Fransella adduces no empirical, historical, or other evidence in support of these assertions, and for good reason—there is none. The "retreat" about which we are most concerned, however, is that of Mr. Fransella and like-minded others from empirical reality and civic morality. The only "tanks" Mr. Fransella has going for him are libertarian think-tanks that, on public-policy matters as disparate as Medicare and illegal drugs, advocate positions most elected leaders, and most Americans, wisely reject.

As we noted in our essay, the founding fathers gave us, the people, a magnificent representative democracy. Warts and all, it still works. Much as Madison explained in *The Federalist Papers*, the system frustrates temporary popular majorities, empowers lasting popular majorities, and checks (even where it does not checkmate) the influence of both majority and minority "factions" that violate "the rights of other citizens" or threaten "the permanent and aggregate interests of the community."

Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, environmental-protection laws, and many other costly post-1935 government programs are "here to stay" because, like it or not, they have withstood the tests of representative democracy: they are strongly favored by duly-elected representatives at every level of government and by most citizens of every race, region, and demographic category. Anyone who doubts this should recall (as we pointed out) that government spending grew, new programs were enacted, and old ones were expanded even during the Reagan presidency. Better still, try running for mayor of Los Angeles or New York City, governor of Wisconsin or Texas, either chamber of Congress, or the presidency of the United States on a "dismantle-it" platform.

In deference to what the nation-building founding fathers unapologetically termed "the common good," the task for contemporary conservatives is to reform existing government programs and relimit government. To begin this task, conservatives must be totally honest about both the costs and the benefits of government programs, and be prepared to restrain activist liberal federal judges and others who are as deluded about what government can and should do as some libertarians are about what it cannot and should not do.

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In our admittedly exploratory essay, we outlined factual arguments about the political significance of recent national elections, the fiscal and administrative realities of devolving federal programs, and the state of civil society. We did not think it necessary to draw up a bill of particulars, but here are some real-world numbers to think about:

• A shift of only *19,500* votes in thirteen districts would have made Tom Foley speaker of the House of Representatives instead of Newt Gingrich. The 1994 Republican electoral mandate, if any, was to relimit government, not to eviscerate it, and certainly not to talk as if eviscerating it were both possible and desirable.

• Welfare spending per case in Wisconsin has *doubled* in an effort to get able-bodied adults off the dole and into work. And under Wisconsin's welfare plan, one can be 2.75 times above the government poverty line and still qualify for social services.

• *Each* of the over 250,000 religious congregations in America would have to increase its charitable social-welfare giving by $300,000 in order to replace the government's current annual commitment.

Finally, we commend to Mr. Fransella the words of Ernest Lefever: "Liberals trivialize government by failing to recognize its limits. Conservatives"—or, as we would prefer, some libertarians—"trivialize it by failing to acknowledge its essential contributions to the security and enrichment of its citizens."

The "Washington Post" vs. Israel

TO THE EDITOR:

Readers of Andrea Levin's "The 'Washington Post' vs. Israel" [November 1997] deserve to know more about the organization she represents, the Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting in America, or CAMERA, than they were told by the editors of COMMENTARY. CAMERA represents itself as an impartial media-watchdog group, but it is not: it is a political-advocacy organization aligned with one faction in Israel's domestic political debate. Its literature strongly defends Israeli land confiscations and settlement construction in the occupied territories; condemns the Oslo accords and the peace process they spawned; and depicts Palestinian leaders uniformly as terrorists committed to Israel's destruction. Its critiques of coverage of the Middle East are directed entirely at reports that fail to support that agenda.

CAMERA and Andrea Levin, its president, misrepresent the separation of opinion and reporting at the *Washington Post*. Contrary to her insinuation, the news staff has no role in preparing the *Post*'s editorials; our correspondents are committed to fair and balanced reporting without editorial comment.

Mrs. Levin claims the *Post*'s coverage is "littered with factual errors," but her article does not cite a single one. Instead, she attempts to dispute the incisive and, in fact, accurate reporting of the *Post's* award-winning Jerusalem correspondent, Barton Gellman, with polemics drawn from CAMERA's own position papers, which are themselves full of misrepresentations.

For example, Andrea Levin and CAMERA have repeatedly asserted that the percentage of Jerusalem's population that is Jewish has fallen since 1967. This position is manufactured by comparing two different Jerusalems: the Jerusalem that existed inside the 1967 city boundaries with the one created by Israel's post-1967 expansion of the city limits, which had the effect of including inside the city large numbers of West Bank Palestinians who have lived in the area all along. In fact, if the same two territorial areas are compared, the percentage of Jews in Jerusalem has significantly increased

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since 1967, and now stands at over 70 percent.

She also says that the East Jerusalem Jewish neighborhood of Neve Yaakov was built on land owned by Jews before 1948. In fact, the largest expropriation of land for that neighborhood, in August 1970, included 12.2 square kilometers, ten of which the government acknowledged to be owned by Arabs.

She says the number of Arab apartments in Jerusalem has risen by more than the number of Jewish apartments; in fact, while there were no Jewish apartments in East Jerusalem in 1967, there are now nearly twice as many Jewish apartments as Arab apartments in that part of the city alone—not to mention the growth of Jewish West Jerusalem.

Mrs. Levin also misrepresents what the *Post* has published. She says a graphic published last September 11 omitted Palestinian obligations under the Oslo accords; in fact, the first item listed in the graphic as an issue in the peace process is Israel's security, with an accompanying explanation about recent suicide bombings and U.S. and Israeli demands for Palestinian action against terrorists. She claims that Gellman has not written about Palestinian "violations" of Oslo; but Gellman has written literally dozens of articles about the human-rights abuses, corruption, and propaganda of the Palestinian Authority, a fact Mrs. Levin herself acknowledged in a 1996 *Jerusalem Post* article that praised his "admirably hard-hitting stories." She claims that the *Post* ignores Israeli victims; but last year she herself hailed the *Post*'s coverage of suicide-bomb victims, saying it "gave a context to the calamities individual Israelis have suffered in the wave of atrocities."

Why the sudden change from praise to excoriation of the *Post*? Last year Andrea Levin and CAMERA targeted the *New York Times*, and found the *Post* a convenient foil. This year, in search of a fresh subject, CAMERA has rather mechanically inverted the formula. While that may make good reading for those who share the group's political agenda, it is not honest journalistic criticism.

JACKSON DIEHL
Assistant Managing Editor/Foreign
Washington Post
Washington, D.C.

TO THE EDITOR:

Andrea Levin makes a clear case against the *Washington Post* and its anti-Israel bias. But why single out the *Post*? Why didn't she also inform us about bias in the *New York Times*, *Newsday* (New York), *Time*, *Newsweek*, *U.S. News & World Report*, and other print media? Or on the television evening news shows, with Dan Rather (CBS), Tom Brokaw (NBC), and especially Peter Jennings (ABC)?

Andrea Levin's article was a small step in the constant battle for balanced reporting. But we need more.

LEONARD STEINBERG
Wantagh, New York

TO THE EDITOR:

Andrea Levin's article about the *Washington Post* could have been written, *mutatis mutandis*, about the *New York Times*. I am amazed at the consistency of *Times* columnists and reporters with regard to Israel. The way they take turns assaulting Israel reminds me of the movie *If It's Tuesday, It Must Be Belgium*. If it's Monday, it must be Anthony Lewis or Thomas L. Friedman; Tuesday, Serge Schmemann, followed by Joel Greenberg and Douglas Jehl, and so on incessantly. There is nothing positive about Israel these writers can find, though, admittedly, there are exceptions at the *Times*, particularly A. M. Rosenthal.

Andrea Levin is justifiably concerned about the *Post*'s influence on the ranks of Washington's elite. The *Times* is also worrisome because of its influence on the members of the Jewish establishment, for whom the paper is their bible.

SAMUEL TENNENBAUM
West Orange, New Jersey

TO THE EDITOR:

Andrea Levin accurately describes the pervasive anti-Israel bias in the editorials and news coverage of the *Washington Post*. Unfortunately, this pattern extends to the op-ed page as well.

A recent and especially egregious example was an op-ed piece (October 19, 1997) by Ehud Sprinzak, a left-wing Israeli professor, claiming that Hamas suicide bombings were simply "revenge for humiliating Israeli actions." It is true that some Hamas bombings have followed Israeli counterterror actions, but certainly not all.

Sprinzak sees the 1994 Hamas bombings as revenge for the killing of Arabs in Hebron in February 1994 by a lone Israeli, Baruch Goldstein; he further claims that all Hamas bombings through the summer of 1995 were revenge for the Goldstein killing. Yet even Hamas itself has never maintained this.

On August 21, 1995, Hamas blew up an Israeli bus in Jerusalem, killing four Jews (one of them a Connecticut schoolteacher, Joan Davenny) and injuring 106 people. An official communiqué from Hamas headquarters in Damascus declared that the aim of the bombing was to harm "the number-one terrorist, Yitzhak Rabin," and that the bombing was timed to coincide with the 23rd anniversary of an attempt by a mentally-unbalanced Australian Christian tourist to set fire to the Al Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem.

The editors of the *Washington Post* could have easily caught Sprinzak's error. Unfortunately, it seems that the *Post*'s fact-checkers are often asleep when Israel-related items cross their desks.

GEORGE K. BERNSTEIN
Brandeis District
Zionist Organization of America
Rockville, Maryland

TO THE EDITOR:

In her splendid piece, "The 'Washington Post' vs. Israel," Andrea Levin describes how the *Washington Post*'s Israel correspondent, Barton Gellman, reported the bizarre fabrication of the Palestinian Authority (PA) that Israel was spiking chewing gum with sex hormones to corrupt Arab women and young boys. She notes that he "balanced" his exposé with the following:

> Israel too devotes substantial effort these days to discrediting its ostensible negotiating partners [by sending] periodic faxes to foreign reporters about unattractive or allegedly unlawful Palestinian behavior.

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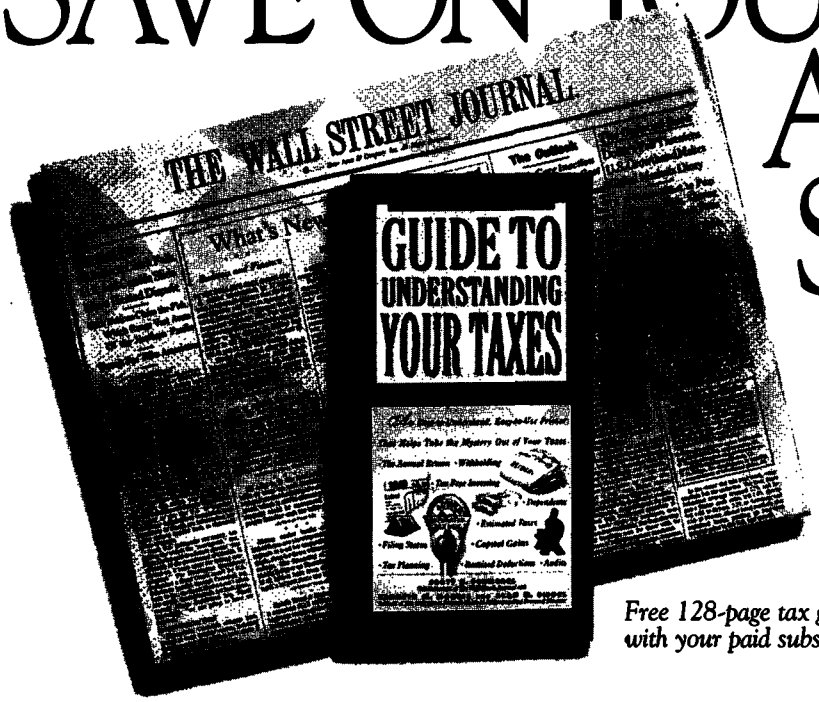

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It need hardly be added that, incredibly, Gellman here was suggesting a parallel between this fantastic charge and Israel's firmly documented and readily verifiable evidence of Palestinian violations of the Oslo accords.

Gellman also noted that the infected-chewing-gum story was being "promoted at the highest level of the Palestinian government." In this he was correct. The PA Minister of Supply said the gum could destroy the genetic system of young boys, and the director of Inspection and Monitoring said it could produce sterility in both men and women.

Other high-level PA officials have claimed that Israeli doctors injected AIDS into Palestinian youngsters and that Jewish prostitutes were also spreading AIDS.

In fact, PA officials and publications regularly engage in the full array of anti-Semitic and anti-Israel rhetoric, including the dissemination of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, the denial of the Holocaust, and the equating of Zionism with Nazism. If any of this were encountered elsewhere, it would elicit strong outrage. But instead, Israel is being urged to respond by engaging in additional "confidence-building" measures to reassure the Palestinians of its good intentions.

JOSEPH LERNER
Jerusalem, Israel

ANDREA LEVIN writes:

Jackson Diehl's defense of the *Washington Post* unfortunately mirrors the shoddy journalism I objected to in the paper's coverage of Israel.

Mr. Diehl begins by claiming that CAMERA has a political agenda, but he provides not a shred of evidence for this charge because he has none. We have never "condemned" the Oslo accords—ever. That is not our business; but we do comment on how accurately and thoroughly the media report events, including those that violate the provisions of Oslo.

Nor is CAMERA "aligned with one faction in Israel's domestic political debate." Even minimal checking would have found that regardless of the party in power, CAMERA has been actively engaged in efforts to counter media distortions. Thus, during the course of the Rabin and Peres administrations, we elicited numerous on-air corrections from networks like National Public Radio and ABC after they had issued false reports about the government's actions. Similarly, with Benjamin Netanyahu in office, we find significant problems of media bias, error, and omission.

Nor have we defended Israeli "land confiscations and settlement construction." What we object to is inaccurate reporting on this question. The *Post*'s Barton Gellman, for example, has written that Israel's land policies, in their exclusion of Arabs, are comparable to Palestinian policies that ban the sale of land to Jews, the only difference being the "penalty" exacted, which in the case of the latter is death to the seller. This is invidious nonsense: Israeli Arabs have equal access, both in law and in practice, to state-owned land, which constitutes four-fifths of the country. Of the land held by individuals in Israel, Arabs own approximately half.

Mr. Diehl then falsely claims that in my article I did not identify a single error of fact made by the *Post*. To name just two, I pointed out errors in connection with the Jewish population of Jerusalem and the status of Neve Yaakov. In his letter, Mr. Diehl touches on these same issues and adds further charges. For example, he denounces what he calls CAMERA's "position papers" noting that the Jewish population of Jerusalem is declining as a percentage of the total. This statistic, he maintains, has been "manufactured by comparing two different" geographic areas, one that existed before the extension of Jerusalem's boundaries and one after.

Again, nonsense. The extension of Jerusalem's borders occurred on June 28, 1967. The Israeli census of East Jerusalem from which we drew our base figures was carried out three months *later*, on September 27, 1967. Thus, the population numbers being compared encompass the same area, and they show that since 1967, Jerusalem's Arab population has grown by 163 percent while the Jewish population has grown by 113.6 percent. As Mr. Diehl rightly notes, Jews constitute just over 70 percent of the total population, but he wrongly says this represents an increase. In fact the opposite is true: in 1967, Jews made up approximately 75 percent of the population.

Next, the question of Neve Yaakov. As I said in my article, the community was founded in 1924; its inhabitants were driven out in 1948 when it was overrun by Arab forces, but it was reestablished after 1967. The largest expropriation of land for the community occurred not in 1970, as Mr. Diehl states, but in 1968, and amounted not to 12.2 square kilometers but to 0.765 square kilometers. Twice as much land was expropriated from Jewish owners as from Arabs.

With regard to building in Jerusalem, Mr. Diehl offers no statistics, but here again his rejoinder is sloppy. The growth I cited was not, of course, in absolute numbers but in percentage of housing units. But the repeated theme of the *Washington Post* that Israel is suffocating Arab construction in the city is in line with its general attempt to deny the burgeoning of the Arab sector of the city, thus showing Israeli policy is discriminatory. In fact, municipal tax records and other corroborating data show that since 1967 the number of Arab residences has increased by 122 percent while Jewish residences have increased by 114 percent. This, too, I pointed out in my article.

I observed as well that the *Post* report on Secretary of State Madeleine Albright's trip to the Middle East (September 11, 1997) was accompanied by a full-page chart listing the requirements of the Oslo accords. It was filled with errors, large and small, the most egregious being a list of the "main provisions" of Oslo that, astonishingly, failed entirely to cite the stipulated responsibilities of the Arabs, including a commitment to fight terrorism; to disarm groups such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad; to end the propaganda war against Israel; to revise the PLO charter calling for Israel's destruction; to limit Palestinian police forces and their armaments; to extradite Pales-

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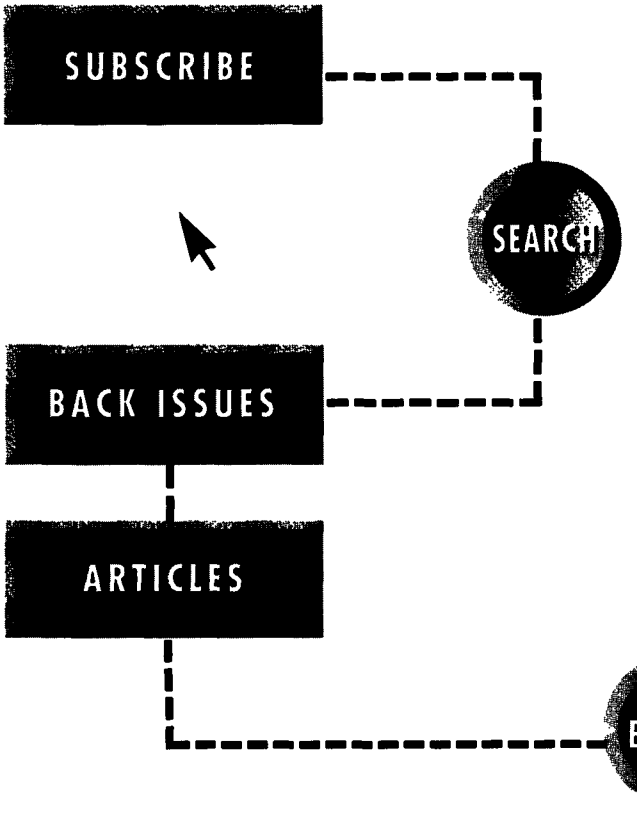

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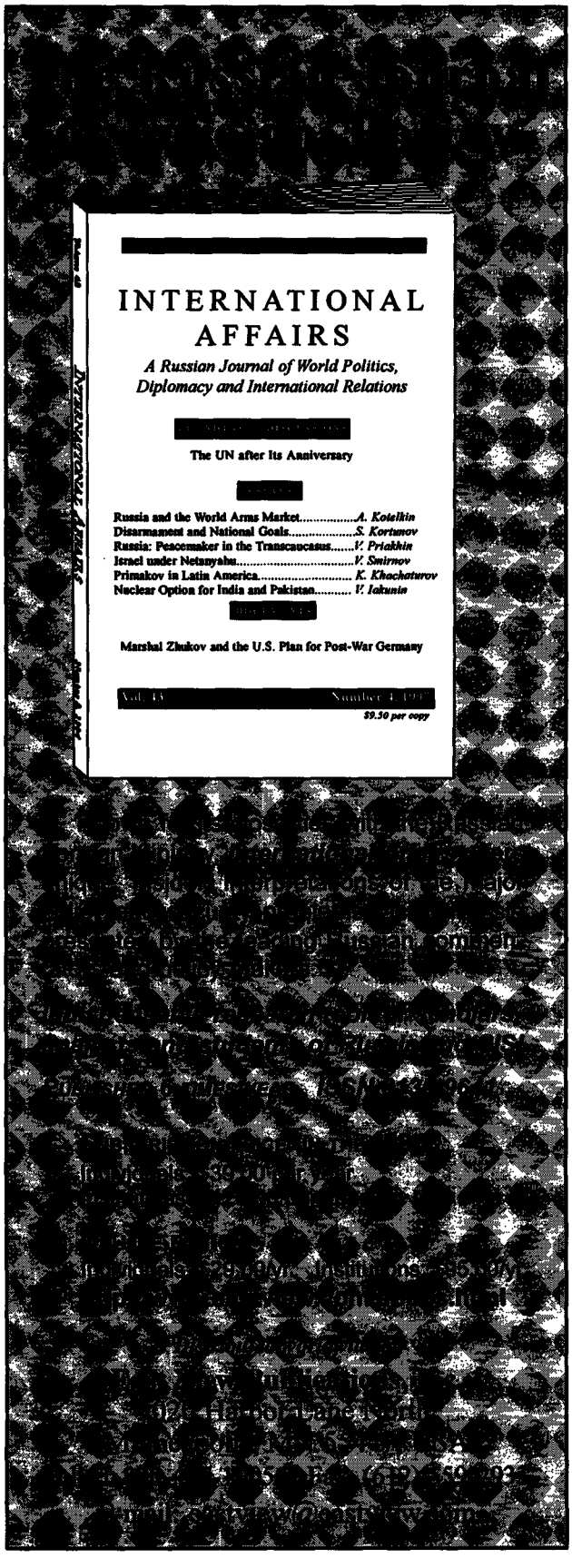
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tinians involved in violence and terror against Israel; to refrain from nation-building activity in Jerusalem; and so on.

Incredibly, one would gain the impression from the *Post* that Palestinians were not subject to a single requirement vis-à-vis Israel; only Israel was required to act, by withdrawing from territory and transferring authority to the Palestinians.

Instead of acknowledging that the paper bungled this piece rather badly, Mr. Diehl claims I misrepresented the *Post* because the "first item listed in the graphic as an issue in the peace process is Israel's security." The passage to which he refers appeared in a separate section, under the heading "The Problems and U.S. Views." It read:

> The cycle of violence—suicide bombings followed by Israeli retaliation against all Palestinians and mass arrests—has gone on for years. Israel says its primary demand following the latest bombing is that Arafat clamp down on Hezbollah guerrillas and other radicals within self-rule areas and has said its forces will pursue suspected terrorists into self-rule areas. Arafat has condemned bombings, but has pleaded that his Palestinian police force cannot control the bombers.

To begin with factual dereliction, "Hezbollah guerrillas" operate in southern Lebanon, not in the area of Palestinian self-rule. More significantly, there is no indication in this passage that clamping down on "radicals" was not simply an Israeli "demand" but a Palestinian *obligation* under Oslo. But most incredible of all is Mr. Diehl's attempt to foist this passage off as an answer to my criticism.

Much of my article addressed factual issues that could have been checked on available databases and in local libraries. That Jackson Diehl, himself the *Post*'s former correspondent in Israel, failed to do any such checking in preparing his reply speaks volumes about the *Post*'s commitment to accuracy and objectivity.

I appreciate the comments of my other correspondents about the pervasive problem of anti-Israel bias in the *Washington Post* and elsewhere, and I share their concern about its pernicious effects.

Libertarians

TO THE EDITOR:

One does not know whether to react to Arch Puddington's screed against the Cato Institute's foreign-policy program ["Libertarians Abroad," December 1997] with amusement or disgust. His "analysis" ranges from shopworn allegations (Cato embraces "isolationism") to the bizarre notion that Cato scholars are closet leftists who exhibit reflexive anti-Americanism.

Advocates of the status quo have a nasty habit of using the "isolationist" epithet to intimidate anyone who has the temerity to suggest that the United States can and should have a more cautious, selective security strategy. It is impossible, however, to reconcile the isolationist stereotype with the positions adopted by Cato foreign-policy experts over the years. Scholars who

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promote global free trade, a liberal immigration policy, and a strong, high-tech military are hardly advocating a hermit republic.

The root problem is that the Puddingtons of the world apparently cannot visualize a security strategy that lies between the extremes of having American troops intervene in such strategically and economically irrelevant snake pits as Somalia, Haiti, and Bosnia and retreating behind the walls of Fortress America. But Cato writers have proposed a sensible alternative: strategic independence. That policy would have America fully engaged in the world economically, culturally, and diplomatically while reserving the use of military force for the defense of vital American security interests.

Such an approach undoubtedly offends Mr. Puddington and others who believe that the United States has an obligation to attempt to solve every problem in the world. But trying to play the global hegemon is the most thankless and counterproductive job imaginable. Not only is it a blueprint for strategic overextension and, ultimately, economic exhaustion, but it subjects the United States to manipulation by an assortment of clients and so-called allies.

The financial costs of global interventionism are staggering. It is no coincidence that America spends more than $260 billion a year on the military while other countries spend small fractions of that amount. For example, this year Japan will spend $43 billion and Germany a paltry $27 billion, even though both countries are located near zones of serious political instability. By appealing to America's vanity (with dire predictions of catastrophe in the absence of U.S. "global leadership"), those nations, as well as Washington's other security dependents, off-load their defense responsibilities onto the United States.

Tolerating such cynical free-riding is not only expensive but dangerous for America. The United States has essentially volunteered to be point man in an assortment of quarrels around the world, while other major powers in an affected region—who have more important interests at stake—stand on the sidelines or, at most, provide token support. It is a pattern that we have seen in Europe (the Bosnian conflict), East Asia (the 1996 crisis in the Taiwan Strait), and numerous times in the Persian Gulf. Incurring such burdens on behalf of free-riding clients is not being a leader; it is being a chump.

Instead of volunteering to be the intervenor of first resort in the international system, the United States should position itself to be the balancer of last resort. That means encouraging,

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not smothering, the development of multiple centers of power in the world. The capable and prosperous nations of Western Europe and East Asia—yes, even with their temporary financial woes—need to take primary responsibility for the security and stability of their regions. But incentives matter. Just as domestic welfare programs encourage an unhealthy dependent mentality on the part of recipients, Washington's military policies foster dependence abroad. Cato's foreign-policy program is based on the belief that the time is long overdue to dethrone Washington's international military welfare queens.

Such a criticism of U.S. policy bears little resemblance to left-wing critiques. The absurdity of Mr. Puddington's attempt to attach the leftist label to Cato scholars is even more apparent when one examines some of the specific policy prescriptions published by the Institute. Cato analysts have, for example, advocated the development and rapid deployment of defenses against ballistic missiles, proposed treating state-sponsored terrorist attacks against American citizens as acts of war, and criticized attempts to subordinate U.S. foreign-policy decisions to the authority of the United Nations. Perhaps Mr. Puddington would care to identify a left-wing organization that endorsed even one (much less all) of those positions.

His "evidence" of Cato's alleged anti-Americanism consists of two quotes from the 1970's. Both were wrenched out of context, and one came from an individual whose connection with the Institute ended more than seventeen years ago. Beyond that feeble attempt to support his scurrilous charge, Mr. Puddington seems aggrieved that Cato scholars have dared to argue that global interventionism has undermined America's domestic freedoms. But Robert Higgs provided definitive evidence of that effect more than a decade ago in his seminal book, *Crisis and Leviathan: Critical Episodes in the Growth of American Government*. Higgs showed conclusively that America's mobilizations to wage the two world wars and the cold war caused a massive shift of power from the private sector, as well as state and local governments, to the federal government. The infamous left-wing extremist Steve Forbes echoed Higgs's theme in his address to the Cato Institute's 20th anniversary dinner last May.

Mr. Puddington's critique is badly off the mark. The objective of the Cato Institute is to encourage the adoption of a foreign policy consistent with the values of a constitutional republic based on the principle of limited government. The lives, freedoms, and financial resources of the American people are not rightfully available for whatever missions suit the whims of political leaders. The U.S. government has a constitutional and moral responsibility to protect the security and liberty of the American republic. It has neither a constitutional nor a moral writ to risk American lives and resources to police the planet, promote democracy, or advance other aims on the foreign-policy bureaucracy's agenda. A policy of strategic independence is not isolationism and it is certainly not anti-Americanism; it is a practical expression of enlightened patriotism.

TED GALEN CARPENTER
Vice President, Defense and Foreign Policy Studies
Cato Institute
Washington, D.C.

TO THE EDITOR:

Arch Puddington scored excellent points against the Cato Institute's foreign policy but overlooked the deeper roots of its ideology, which infect far more than Cato. This ideology is not isolationist in the traditional sense. While Cato preaches a doctrine of geopolitical withdrawal, it is combined with a passion for global commerce and economic interdependence. This is the doctrine of classical liberalism, which has for two centuries preached the superiority of private actions and interests in world affairs as well as domestic. Indeed, in this view, there is no difference between home and abroad.

After every major conflict since the Seven Years' War, idealists have claimed that the long dark night of great-power rivalry and incessant warfare was finally passing away before the dawn of a new enlightened era based on mutual economic gain. Richard Cobden, leader of the British free-trade movement in the mid-1800's, summarized this view nicely, claiming that commerce was "the grand panacea" and that under its influence "the motive for large and mighty empires, for gigantic armies and great fleets would die away."

The same sorts of claims are made today by both major political parties in this country. William Brock, for example, former Republican Senator and U.S. trade representative during the Reagan era, has commented that "the conduct of the United States in leading the cause of liberalized trade is going to have more to do with the process of peace than all the diplomats put together." Not surprisingly, transnational corporations, who want no geopolitical interference with their global investment, production, and distribution systems, have also embraced this view and those who espouse it.

Because of its economic arguments against socialism, many have turned to classical liberal doctrine without understanding its full ideological context. Articles like Mr. Puddington's are important in pointing out the need to change ideological concepts to restore the traditional role of commercial policy as a support for national strength in diplomacy and security. The libertarian perspective, which gives precedence to petty, shallow, and transient private interests over the broader, deeper, and more enduring concerns of national communities striving in a dangerous world, cannot possibly serve as our guide.

WILLIAM HAWKINS
Burke, Virginia

ARCH PUDDINGTON writes:

Ted Galen Carpenter vehemently denies that the Cato Institute is "isolationist," but the many books, essays, and conference papers that I reviewed for my article demonstrate otherwise.

Throughout its history, Cato has shown a remarkably consistent point of view toward U.S. foreign policy, finding failure in each and every instance of American

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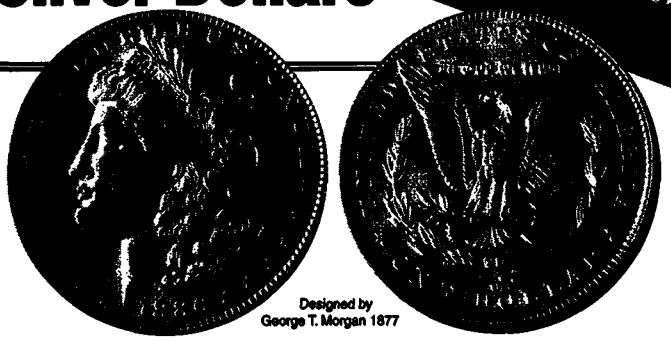

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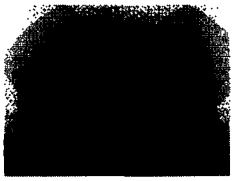

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intervention abroad, from Korea to the Persian Gulf and Bosnia. Cato staff and their like-thinking allies invariably describe U.S. global leadership as a recipe for present or future foreign-policy "catastrophes," "disasters," or "quagmires." To take but one ludicrous—even laughable—example, Cato has recently published policy papers, co-authored by Mr. Carpenter, which warn that extending NATO to the East is likely to involve the United States in wars between Poland and Belarus, and between Hungary and Serbia.

At the heart of Cato's analysis of American foreign policy is the notion, elaborated yet again in Mr. Carpenter's letter, that American intervention in foreign conflicts, including the cold war, has given rise to an all-powerful state and has drastically narrowed our civil liberties. But how is this to be reconciled with the actual experience of the postwar period? Far from being dominated by official secrecy and coercion, as libertarians charge, this era saw an astonishing expansion of individual liberties, including a transformation in race relations and in the opportunities available to women. And for all of Mr. Carpenter's talk about a suffocating national-security state, America today has an all-volunteer military, shrinking defense expenditures, and an aggressively critical press.

Moreover, American leadership has contributed to an unprecedented growth of freedom around the world, including the widespread adoption of free-market principles. Even now, the United States is adapting far better to the changes generated by a globalized economy than are countries like Germany and Japan, with their comparatively small military forces and far lower diplomatic profiles.

Only blind ideology can explain why those who profess to be devotees of liberty find so much to condemn in postwar American foreign policy, which has brought peace and prosperity both to ourselves and to our allies in Europe and Asia.

I appreciate William Hawkins's pertinent reminder of the tendency among some libertarians to assume that free trade by itself will produce a world of harmony and peace, though I am somewhat more persuaded than he seems to be of the relationship between free markets and freedom generally. Still, as he rightly argues, free trade is no substitute for vigorous diplomacy and a strong defense.

The "New Republic"

TO THE EDITOR:

Midge Decter's knowingness in her article written *in terrorem* of the *New Republic* ["In and Out at the 'New Republic,'" Novem-

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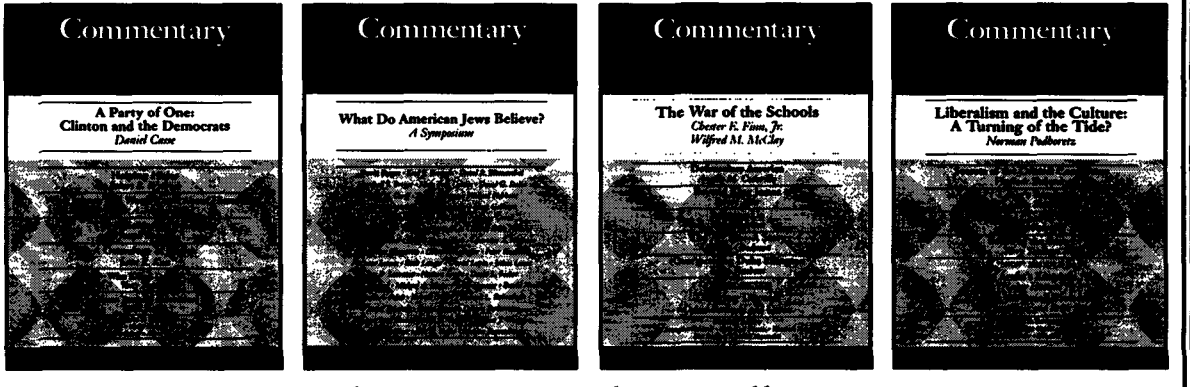

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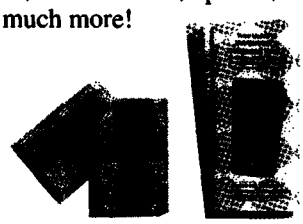

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ber 1997] is amusing, except her knowingness about one episode in the magazine's recent history, which is not at all amusing.

I refer to her repugnant discussion of Andrew Sullivan. For a start, Sullivan never "announced that he had contracted AIDS." That is because he had not contracted AIDS. He had contracted HIV. I am not surprised that this distinction is lost on a person with Midge Decter's attitude toward Sullivan's sexual "coloration." Then she refers to Sullivan's cause of state-sanctioned marriage for homosexuals (or rather, to his "cause": the quotation marks are designed to function like surgical gloves), and she observes that his medical condition has vitiated it:

> In Sullivan's grim announcement of his illness, and in the flagrantly contradictory message it conveyed as to the character of the homosexual love he championed, the intellectual integrity of the argument seemed rather to be undercut.

Really? In all the centuries in which sexually transmitted diseases threatened the lives of men and women, was the character of the heterosexual love that they championed, or the legitimacy of the institution of marriage with which they championed it, undercut? Miss Decter's implication is that if a gay man is sick, then he is loose; that a gay man's medical condition is his moral condition. How does she know that Sullivan did not meet his misfortune in the arms of someone he loved? I don't know, and I don't care. And that is really the point: you do not adequately respond to a philosophical argument or a political argument by peeping into somebody's bedroom.

What does a person's private life have to do with the truth or the falsity of his or her views? Midge Decter believes in religion; but her belief in religion does not stand or fall on her own practice of religion, whatever it is. She believes in family values; but her belief in family values does not stand or fall on the history of her own family, whatever it is. Her beliefs, like Sullivan's beliefs, are either right or wrong. I understand that there is the risk of hypocrisy; but there are worse things than hypocrisy. Indecency, for example, and a lack of charity.

LEON WIESELTIER
New Republic
Washington, D.C.

MIDGE DECTER writes:

I must admit that I am somewhat puzzled by the tone in which Leon Wieseltier has elected to take me to task. Or I should say "tones," since first he patronizes me with his amusement and then he thunders at my "indecency."

It is true that I was mistaken in calling Andrew Sullivan's condition AIDS rather than HIV, the condition in which AIDS may be held at bay with medication. It is a common mistake, and I should not have made it—a point that has no bearing whatsoever on what I said about the disparity between Andrew Sullivan's preachments and his practices. For everyone, including Mr. Wieseltier, knows that HIV is a condition contracted in only a limited number of ways: anal intercourse with someone infected, a drug needle shared with someone infected, a transfusion with the blood of someone infected, or birth to a mother infected. And everyone also knows—again, including Mr. Wieseltier—that this horrible disease, which has carried off untold thousands of homosexual men, does not afflict those who practice the kind of marital monogamy on which Andrew Sullivan based his demand that homosexuals be granted the right to legally sanctioned marriage.

Of course heterosexuals have always contracted venereal diseases. But what is Mr. Wieseltier's point in bringing it up? Whether or not people so infected are to be called hypocrites when they express their belief in marital bliss depends entirely on who they are. If Ralph Reed, say, or my dear friend Gary Bauer were to announce in the *Washington Times* that he had come down with the clap, would the *New Republic* or even the ever deeply feeling Leon Wieseltier find it no occasion for remark?

Now, as it happens, Andrew Sullivan played only an incidental role in the point I was making about the *New Republic*. Nor am I, nor have I ever been, interested in his or any other homosexual's private life. It is they and not I who have made their private activities a matter of public debate and discussion. Nevertheless, I am prompted by the moral spanking delivered to me in this letter to mention something that has been haunting me for several years now. HIV-AIDS is a disease that for homosexuals has been the result of a particular habit of conduct. It has also brought to their community untold death and suffering. Speaking of decency, how has it come to be a mark of compassion to display one's understanding and support for the conduct of friends and associates who are willfully killing themselves?

Yiddish

TO THE EDITOR:

I share with Ruth R. Wisse ["Yiddish: Past, Present, Imperfect," November 1997] the concern of many Yiddish scholars and teachers in America today. While a great deal of attention is being paid to such grand projects as the National Yiddish Book Center in Amherst, Massachusetts, which Mrs. Wisse discusses, serious Yiddish-language programs are gradually disappearing from the scene.

A few examples should suffice. New York, the home of over two million Jews, has a few beginner Yiddish classes at Columbia University, Queens College, New York University, the Jewish Theological Seminary, and Yeshiva University, with enrollments ranging from a dozen to twenty students. Beyond basic-level instruction, however, classes shrink to a handful of students at best, or simply get canceled for lack of sufficient staffing or funding. Thus, studies of more advanced Yiddish are left to the small summer seminars conducted by the YIVO Institute, which, though adequate, are extremely limited in scope and resources. Outside New York, Brandeis—the flagship university for secular Jewish learning—cannot offer a full-time position in Yiddish. Like many other colleges

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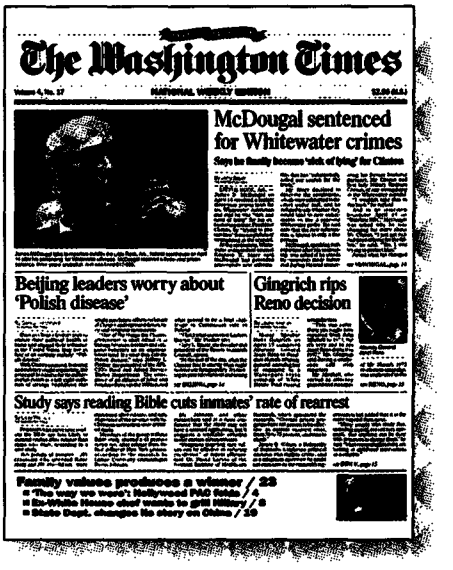
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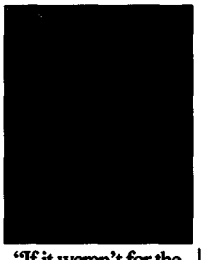

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and universities, it operates with adjuncts, part-time lecturers, or Yiddish speakers willing to teach for a few *groshen* as a side job.

Jewish philanthropists should recognize this crisis and begin funding Yiddish studies wherever needed. Unfortunately, Jewish-studies departments, even at major institutions, place Yiddish at the bottom of their priorities. As a result, classes, if offered, are often taught by unqualified people. If nothing is done, pretty soon there will be no one to read those wonderful books gathered in Aaron Lansky's impressive library in the Massachusetts countryside.

MICHAEL TAUB
Skirball Department of Hebrew and Judaic Studies
New York University
New York City

TO THE EDITOR:

Ich hob a gute un a shlechte besurah (translation: "I have good news and bad news") about Ruth R. Wisse's "Yiddish: Past, Present, Imperfect."

Di gute besurah (the good news): Mrs. Wisse would surely *shep nachas* from (be proud of) my family. My daughter Chaya was already writing poetry in Yiddish at age six. She now has a career as a teacher of Jewish studies, and most of the schools she has taught in have used Yiddish as the language of instruction. She and her husband are bringing up my grandson, now almost two, as a native speaker of *mama loshn* (mother tongue); they live in a *shtetl* (small community) in northeastern Iowa, together with about 30 other like-minded Yiddish-speaking families.

My other eight children have also been (and are being) educated in Yiddish-speaking schools, and are perfectly bilingual.

Di shlechte besurah (the bad news): we belong to that class of religiously committed people whose "robust demographic vitality" Mrs. Wisse (for some unknown reason) attributes to "the blessings of American pluralism" rather than to our own pride and commitment. There are thousands of children today being brought up to speak Yiddish as their primary language. Their teachers all use grammars, dictionaries, and workbooks, but the material produced by YIVO is utterly worthless, since YIVO has made up spelling of its own that contemporary Yiddish speakers are not accustomed to.

As a teenager, I became a dedicated "Yiddishist." I joined YIVO in 1969 (I was probably the only member under sixty) and taught myself Yiddish in order to read Sholem Aleichem and Isaac Bashevis Singer in the original. (I did not know at the time that Singer was already writing in English and then translating it back into Yiddish because nobody read his work in Yiddish any more.) After I became *frum* (religious), however, I stopped reading Singer. Not because the strictly Orthodox (*haredi*) "thought police" confiscated my Singer books, but because I felt denigrated and insulted by his frequently obscene portrayal of my religious community.

Mrs. Wisse lauds the National Yiddish Book Center as "the most exciting new venture in American Jewish institutional life since the founding of AIPAC"; its purpose, she says, is to spearhead a revival in "the serious study of the demanding and particularistic civilization that brought Yiddish into being." Isn't this "serious study" of that "demanding and particularistic civilization" already well under way in Kiryas Joel, Borough Park, and Crown Heights; Southfield, Michigan; Postville, Iowa; and hundreds of other places across the world?

I am sure that Mrs. Wisse has made many excursions to Kiryas Joel and Borough Park to study the society of native speakers of Yiddish in the same way, I suppose, an anthropologist will mingle with aborigines on a reservation or savages in the wild.

Apart from collecting debris from attics and basements, how does the National Yiddish Book Center plan to bring about a revival of Yiddish culture? By publishing new books (I have a manuscript that has been collecting dust for ages)? Holding classes (where will the teachers come from)? Providing translation services for the inheritors of ancestral Yiddish documents? Holding performances of Yiddish plays or screenings of Yiddish movies?

I am disturbed by Mrs. Wisse's dismissal of the overwhelming majority of Yiddish-speakers as "too intent on staving off secular influence" to be of any value in preserving the Yiddish heritage. It seems to me that the reverse is true: the operators of the National Yiddish Book Center, not to mention the teachers of Yiddish studies in universities, are so intent on staving off "religious influence" that they shun the very people who are the most capable of assisting their Yiddish revival.

LEAH M. BERKOWITZ
Southfield, Michigan

TO THE EDITOR:

It is with deep regret that I learned from Ruth R. Wisse's article of the passing of Khone Shmeruk and his wife, Mira. Khone Shmeruk was my teacher in a Displaced Persons camp in Stuttgart, Germany, after the war. I have always remembered him as a unique individual who somehow managed to radiate his love both of children and of teaching.

In her article, Mrs. Wisse also mentions the strange relationship between the hasidim and the Yiddishists. Let me relate a personal experience that illustrates her point.

Some years ago I got lost in the ultra-Orthodox Mea Shearim district of Jerusalem. Being the son of a fanatical Yiddishist, I knew that in Mea Shearim I would have no language problem. I picked out a handsome young Hasid in full regalia, and in my impeccable (Vilna) Yiddish I asked him to show me the way to the main bus terminal. Very pleasantly he invited me to walk with him, since he was going in the same direction. On the way, he asked me the usual questions one might ask a tourist: Where are you from? Are you having a good time? etc. Suddenly, he stopped, looked at me very intently and asked, "Are you a Jew?" When I answered yes, he gave me the coldest shoulder I have ever received in all my life.

ELIEZER GREISDORF
Toronto, Ontario, Canada

RUTH R. WISSE writes:

My correspondents appear to have taken it upon themselves to confirm certain points of my article: Eliezer Greisdorf to recall

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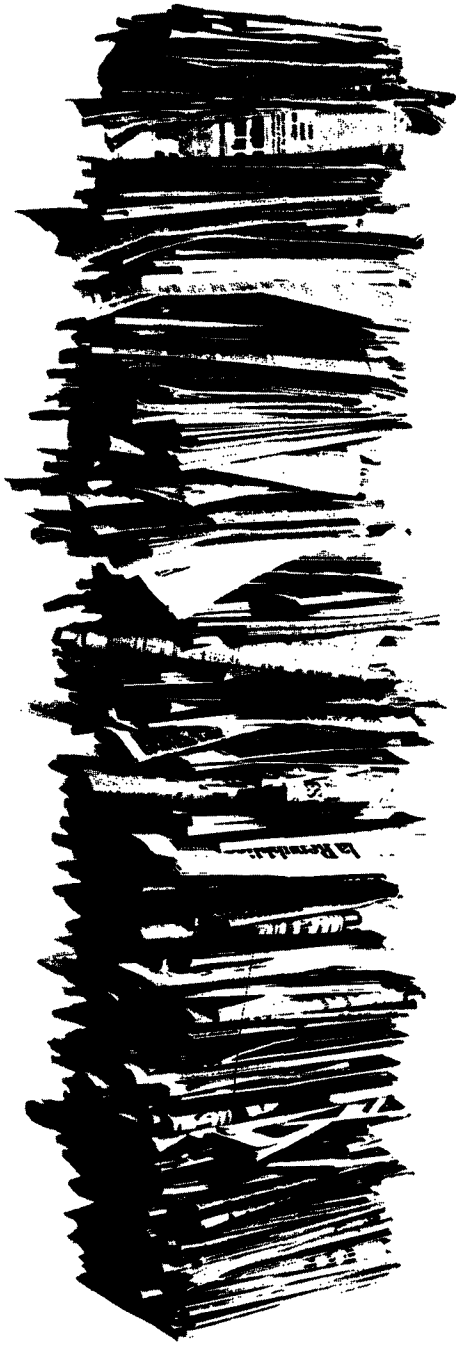

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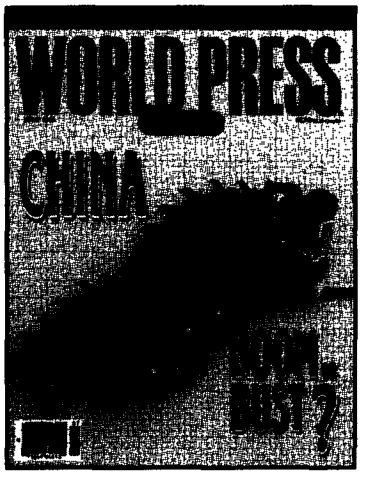

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Khone Shmeruk's influence as a teacher, for which I thank him; Michael Taub to plead for more Yiddish scholars; Leah M. Berkowitz to demonstrate the contempt of some hasidic Jews for modern Yiddish culture.

I commented in my article on the failure of some secular Yiddishists to translate their love of the language into a love of the people whose language it is; Mr. Greisdorf's anecdote and Mrs. Berkowitz's animus remind me that *frum* Jews may do no better.

The YIVO project to which Mrs. Berkowitz objects is the standardization of spelling, a process that occurs in every literate society, sometimes more and sometimes less spontaneously. The Communists objected to YIVO orthography because it gave special status to *loshn koydesh*, the holy tongue. Does this pious woman want to delight the enemies of religion by providing, from the Right, a mirror image of their intolerance?

More on Sinatra

TO THE EDITOR:

It takes a while for COMMENTARY to reach me in Japan, but I hope it is not too late to express my sincere thanks to Terry Teachout for his excellent article on Frank Sinatra ["Taking Sinatra Seriously," September 1997], which is objective, informative, and extremely well-balanced. This is the first piece I have seen on Sinatra in a top-flight intellectual magazine.

I have only one suggestion: expand the discography a bit. Let me offer some examples myself, starting with the early years. Since long-play (LP) records were the only ones available for most of Sinatra's career and make up the majority of my own collection, I have arranged the list by label and identified the albums by LP number. Many or most of these have been subsequently issued on CD's.

RCA Victor: *The Tommy Dorsey-Frank Sinatra Sessions, Volumes 1 to 3* (RCA CPL2-4334-4336) includes on six records all 84 songs that Sinatra did with Tommy Dorsey between February 1, 1940 and July 2, 1942. In addition to the tender and gentle voice of the young Sinatra, one can, of course, hear Dorsey's incredibly smooth and beautiful trombone.

Columbia: *The Voice: The Columbia Years 1943-1952* (C6X 40343) contains 72 songs on six records that collect the cream of Sinatra's time with Columbia, including one of Sinatra's most poignant offerings, "Why Try to Change Me Now?," his last recording for Columbia on September 17, 1952. This set also has the added feature of commentary by some of the leaders of the music and film world.

Capitol: I fully agree with Mr. Teachout that Sinatra reached his peak in the studio albums he made for Capitol in the 1950's, and with his selection of Sinatra's core legacy. I would only suggest that a few more love songs—happy love songs—be included.

Songs for Young Lovers (Capitol CDP 7 484702) contains some of the finest recordings ever made of some very fine standards: Rodgers and Hart's "My Funny Valentine" and "Little Girl Blue"; the Gershwins' "A Foggy Day" and "They Can't Take That Away from Me"; and Cole Porter's "I Get a Kick Out of You." Recorded with Nelson Riddle on November 5 and 6, 1953, this was Sinatra's first LP album for Capitol, and is now available on CD with another early Capitol album, *Swing Easy* from 1954.

This Is Sinatra (Capitol T-768) and *This Is Sinatra, Volume 2* (Capitol W-982), 1954 and 1955, contain the beautiful "Three Coins in the Fountain"; the huge hit "Young at Heart"; the very lovely "You'll Always Be the One I Love," "Time After Time," and "It's the Same Old Dream" (repeats of his excellent recordings for Columbia); plus Sinatra's theme song, "Put Your Dreams Away," also recorded earlier for Columbia.

Sinatra Sings of Love and Things (Capitol/EMI ED26 01781) is a compilation of songs originally issued as singles between 1957 and 1962, including "The Nearness of You" (superior to his 1947 recording of the same song), "The Moon Was Yellow," "I Love Paris," "Monique," "Love Looks So Well on You," "Sentimental Baby," and "Something Wonderful Happens in Summer." If forced to pick my all-time favorite Sinatra album of love songs, I would choose this one and *Songs for Young Lovers* (a tie!).

Tell Her You Love Her (Capitol DT 1919) contains the warm title song, plus a whole host of outstanding standards.

Reprise: *Sinatra's Sinatra* (Reprise CD FS2-1010) contains twelve of Sinatra's own personal favorites, most of which were recorded previously for Capitol and Columbia. The only exception is one of Sinatra's all-time greats: "Call Me Irresponsible," words by Sammy Cahn, music by Jimmy Van Heusen (1963). The album would be worth having for this song alone.

Although Sinatra's voice began to show inevitable decline by the late 1960's, he produced some of his most moving recordings during this period. *Cycles* (Reprise FS 1027), an album containing certain songs of loss and defeat, offers a good representation.

In closing, let me say with pleasure that among the many good reasons I read COMMENTARY, perhaps the main one is Terry Teachout's interesting, highly educational, and, where appropriate, politically *in*correct articles on a wide variety of musical subjects.

CHET GOTTSCHALK
Sagamihara City, Japan

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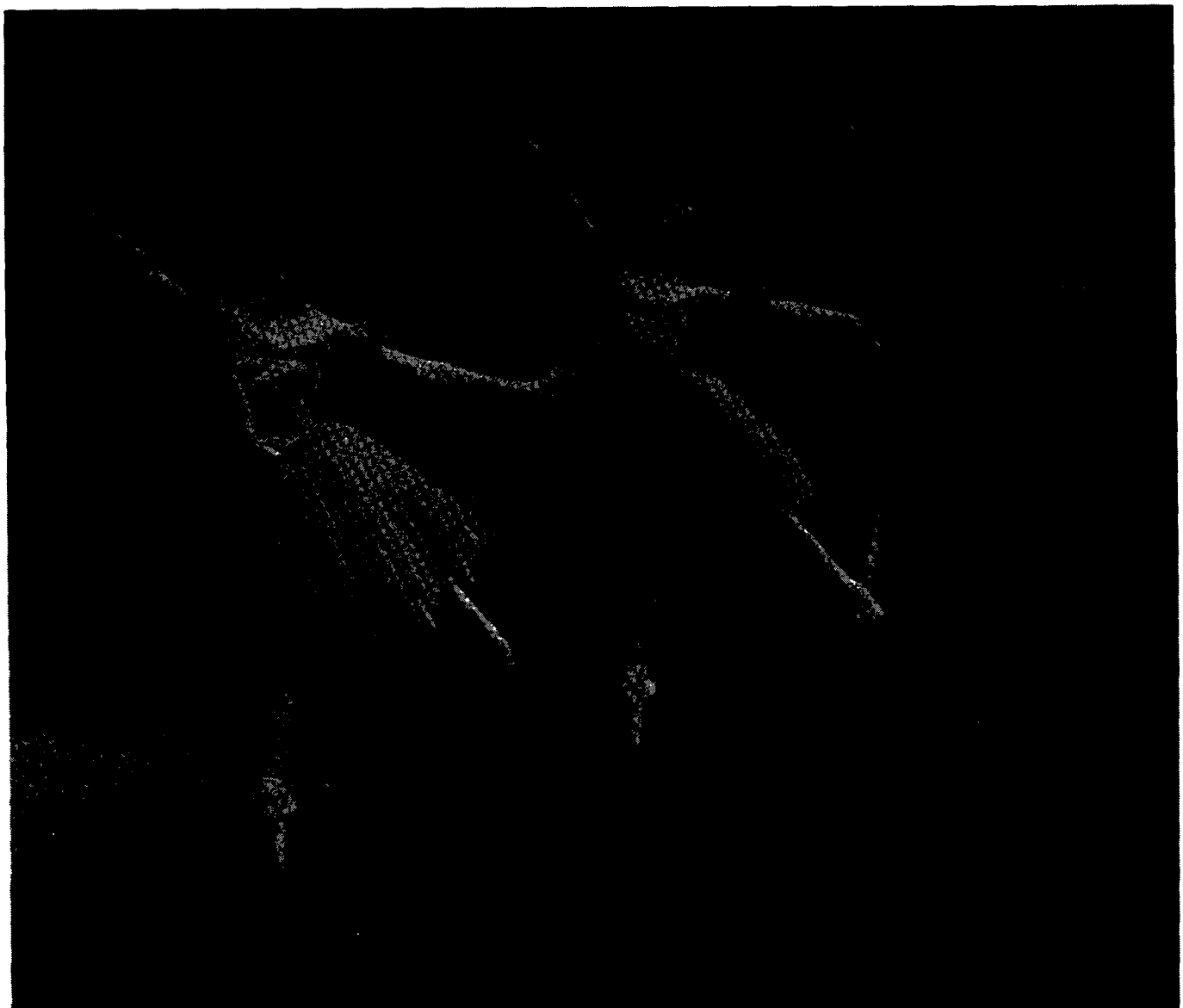

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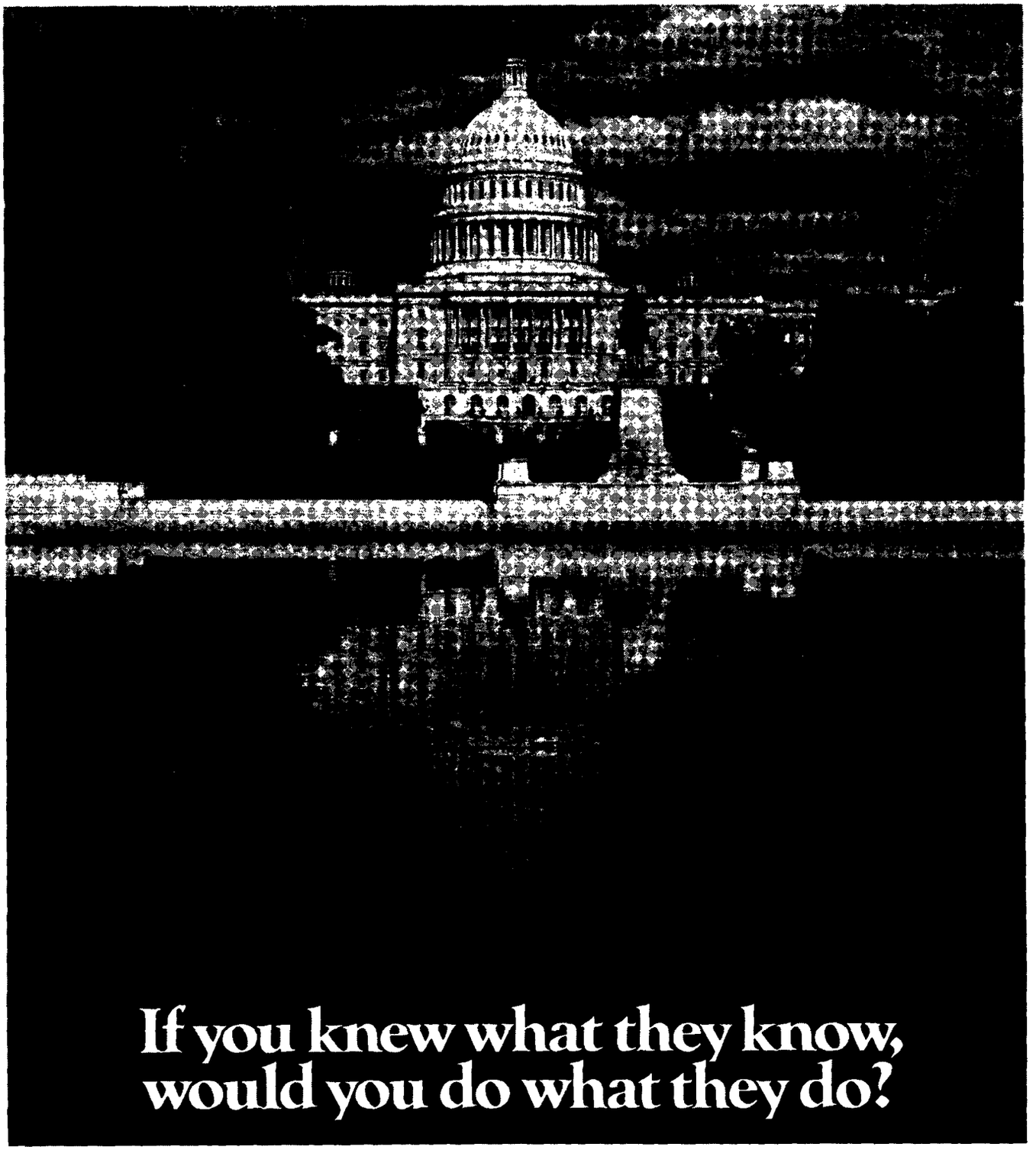

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Commentary
February 1998

Asian Values and the Asian Crisis

Francis Fukuyama

A MERE decade ago, Americans at every level of business and government were being chided for their failure to emulate the example of Asia. The key to that region's economic success was said to be its cultural values—a combination of the work ethic, respect for community and authority, and a tradition of paternalistic government—all of which were contrasted invidiously to the rampant dysfunctionality then plaguing the American economy and American society alike.

Today, as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) imposes Western, market-oriented rules on one desperate Asian country after another, the mood has shifted to the other extreme. Asian values, we are now told, are what led to nepotistic credit allocation, an overly meddlesome state, and a disastrous lack of transparency in financial transactions. From being the cause of Asia's success, Asian values are now seen as the root of last summer's currency crisis and of the ensuing economic meltdown across nearly the whole region.

Neither reading is correct.

II

THE SUBJECT of Asian values emerged in the early 1990's thanks largely to two politicians: Lee Kuan Yew, then Prime Minister of Singapore, and Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad of Malaysia. Each was in pursuit of a relatively narrow agenda. Lee, seeking to improve his ties with China, hoped to gain favor in Beijing by promoting a mildly anti-Western sense of Chinese cultural identity. Mahathir, for his part, wanted to fend off the Bush administration's push to create a forum known as Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation, in favor of a new Asian political bloc that would exclude "white" powers like Australia and the United States.

But the idea of a distinct Asian cultural and political identity had a larger resonance as well. In part, it reflected the genuine pride felt by many people in the region at the stunning success of their economies over the previous two generations. It also, however, served the interests of states eager to shield themselves both from Western criticisms of their human-rights practices and from pressure to open their protected domestic markets to imports and foreign investment. To the "soft" authoritarian governments ruling Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, and increasingly the People's Republic of China, "Asian values" offered an apparently principled defense of their reluctance to broaden political participation.

The idea of Asian values was, however, problematic from the start. As anyone knows who has spent time in that part of the world, there are huge cultural differences not only among the various countries but also among the ethnic groups that make

FRANCIS FUKUYAMA *is Hirst professor of public policy at George Mason University and director of its International Transactions program.*

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up multicultural societies like Singapore and Malaysia. In southern China, families are both large and cohesive; in Japan, much less large and socially less significant. Whereas in Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan the state has traditionally commanded substantial respect, in many parts of Southeast Asia it has been historically weak or nonexistent. Confucian societies tend to invest more resources in education than do Islamic, Malay, or Catholic ones—indeed, Lee Kuan Yew was forced to pull back from his embrace of Confucianism for the simple reason that it did not reflect the cultural heritage of the 15 percent of Singapore's population that is of Malay descent.

As for the relationship between Asian values and economic success, that is dubious at best. Not only have attitudes toward work and money varied tremendously from one part of Asia to another, but Asia as a whole was rightly regarded as an economic basket-case for much of the first half of the 20th century. As Max Weber pointed out in 1905, no Asian society had ever produced indigenous capitalist institutions; economic growth became possible only after contact with the West and with Western ideas of property rights, the rule of law, scientific rationalism, modern state institutions, and the like. To put it another way, economic growth was contingent on the *rejection* by Asians of important elements of their own cultural heritage, including the Mandarin disdain for commerce and physical labor.

This is not to say that Asian values did not also turn out to be economically valuable: the Confucian emphasis on education and meritocratic advancement, for example, happened to dovetail very nicely with the requirements of a modernizing society. But as in the case of the impoverished Asian immigrants who came to Canada and the United States and made a success there, those values could come into play only when combined with other values and institutions imported from the West.

ASIDE FROM inculcating good work habits, Asian values have also been said to have a political dimension. Thus, Lee and Mahathir have argued that their brand of authoritarian government is well-suited to Confucian traditions of hierarchy and enables the state to focus its resources on economic development while avoiding the high degree of social disorder characteristic of Western democracies.

Unfortunately, the alleged cultural fit between Asian values and authoritarian government is a matter more of convenience than of principle. In any old and complex cultural system—whether Confucianism or Christianity—it is possible to find sources legitimating totally contradictory practices. Historically, Christians reading the same Bible have both promoted and condemned slavery. Similarly, if Lee Kuan Yew can cite Confucian sources to support rule by benevolent authoritarianism, Taiwan's Lee Teng-hui has cited other sources to prove the compatibility of Confucian tradition with the kind of democratic institutions he has sought to build in his island nation. All cultural systems evolve. Given the examples of Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan, who is to say that "Asian values" constitute an insuperable obstacle to the establishment of Western-style democracy?

Nor is the economic efficacy of authoritarian government clear-cut, as the careful studies of Robert Barro and others have shown. When such governments function well, as in the case of Singapore and of South Korea under military rule, they can indeed be very effective at promoting rapid growth; but when they function badly, like Brazil or Peru during the 1970's, their economies tend to perform much more poorly than democracies.

It is true that Asian authoritarians have, on the whole, been more competent and honest than Latin American ones, but, as the current crisis already suggests, there can be no assurance this will continue to be the case over the long run. In the absence of adequate feedback mechanisms and institutional controls on state power, it ends up being a matter of luck whether authoritarian institutions are turned toward the single-minded pursuit of investment and growth or become vehicles for padding the bank accounts of the politicians in charge.

III

IF ASIAN values are not the cause of either rapid growth or of a superior form of governance, are they, instead, a catalyst of excessive state intervention and "crony capitalism"? And if so, can they be blamed for the economic debacle that occurred in the wake of the collapse of the Thai baht and other regional currencies in the summer of 1997? Alas, in sickness as in health, Asia is a very diverse place, and the causes of crisis vary from country to country.

The trouble in Thailand began when the government's efforts to defend the baht's link to the dollar came under attack in international currency markets. But it was the very stability of that link that had encouraged *private* firms, in Thailand and

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abroad, to borrow and lend short-term funds to finance speculation in real estate and other questionable ventures. If there was failure at the government level, it lay not in excessive interventionism but in an insufficiency of regulatory power: the Thai state was unable to impose proper reporting, disclosure, and reserve requirements on its banking system. And if there has been longer-term failure at the government level, it is again one of omission rather than commission—a failure, that is, to invest adequately in public education and physical infrastructure.

The problem facing Thailand—overzealous speculative investment fueled by cheap credit—has been a feature of capitalist markets for as long as they have existed. Nor is Thailand alone in the region in this respect. Most Southeast Asian governments have opened their economies to foreign investment and trade, and some, like Singapore and Hong Kong, have been models of state minimalism in the economic realm—not that this has saved them from being buffeted in the global financial markets.

Of course, the crisis today is centered not in any of these places but in Japan and especially South Korea. In both countries, state agencies for the past 45 years have indeed played a hyperactive role in guiding economic life, primarily through the allocation of credit.

Intervening on both a macro- and microeconomic level, the Korean government protected domestic producers from foreign competition and created a government-industry machine that resembled a time bomb waiting to go off. The large Korean conglomerates known as *chaebol* became addicted to cheap, often subsidized credit for ambitious expansion projects. While these paid off during the country's high-growth period from 1961 to 1987, the absence of constraints, either in the form of hard budgets or in the form of shareholder demands for a return on equity, led to spectacular mistakes, as in the 1996 decision by the Samsung conglomerate to become the sixth major Korean automobile manufacturer. The tremendous power vested in government also led to cases of massive corruption; former President Roh Tae Woo stole some $600 million, and politics played a role in the recent collapse of Hanbo Steel.

Japan's sins are by now familiar: lack of openness, regulation, and transparency in the financial sector, coupled with a penchant for keeping faltering firms alive at all costs rather than letting managers and shareholders absorb the consequences of failure. All this has led to a rolling seven-year crisis in the banking system that has seriously weakened the country's still-competitive manufacturing firms. As in the case of Korea, government intervention in markets has persisted long past the point where it makes economic sense.

But the fact that government intervention is no longer functional in places like Japan and South Korea does not mean that it served no purpose in the past. Although many American economists assert dogmatically that state intervention *always* produces inefficiencies, the fact is that these same meddlesome Asian governments presided over periods of growth that were historically unprecedented anywhere in the world. Perhaps one might argue that, in the absence of state intervention, Asian growth from 1950 to the 1990's could have been even higher than it was; but to imagine that one period of unprecedentedly high growth should have yielded to another and even higher one is to indulge in fantasy.

WHICH BRINGS us to the other frequently-named culprit for Asia's present troubles, "crony capitalism." If Northeast and Southeast Asia share a common failing, it is that business decisions are frequently made by other than market criteria. The entire region is permeated with personalistic ties of all sorts, ranging from the mutual obligations that Japanese managers feel toward their workers or their business-network (*keiretsu*) partners to the forthrightly corrupt dealings of Indonesia's Suharto family. In Southeast Asia, family connections link the far-flung overseas Chinese communities; in Northeast Asia, there are long-term corporate alliances or informal connections between government overseers and the firms they ostensibly regulate.

Greater formality, based on the strict rule of law, is a pressing need everywhere in Asia. Nevertheless, "crony capitalism" is a misnomer. The term was initially coined to describe the Philippines under the late Ferdinand Marcos, a place where huge amounts of money were being siphoned off by the dictator's close associates. Historically, despite exceptions like the Philippines, China, and Indonesia, East Asia boasted astonishingly *low* levels of corruption. In light of the huge regulatory powers vested in Japanese, Korean, and Taiwanese bureaucrats over the past two generations, one might reasonably have expected to see nepotism, influence-peddling, and stagnation in these countries on the level of, say, Mobutu's Zaire. Instead, while major scandals have emerged over time, all three countries have demonstrated an ability to

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build strong, competent, and reasonably honest government institutions that can stimulate a high level of savings and direct them to productive investment.

No society can expect to keep this going forever, which is why formal institutions are critical in the long run. But few countries outside Asia have shown an ability to make "personalism" pay off so spectacularly even in the short run.

In any case, is it so obvious that "personalism" is always a bad thing? Ironically, business-school professors and information-technology gurus have been urging *American* firms to move in precisely that direction. In a sophisticated economy, we are told, work is done by highly educated professionals who must be allowed to organize themselves. To that end, American companies are being advised to replace their large, bureaucratic, hierarchical structures with smaller, flatter ones linked by informal networks. Many high-tech firms have also adopted a policy of "relational contracting," basing their business decisions not on price and performance criteria but on relationships of trust with suppliers or with clients that resemble nothing so much as the Japanese *keiretsu*.

IV

IF ASIAN values are not central to the saga of Asia's economic rise and recent decline, and will not, in and of themselves, determine the kind of political system that ultimately prevails in that part of the world, what, then, *is* their significance? The answer lies in the sphere of social relations.

Among all the criticisms of the West lodged by proponents of Asian values in the early 1980's, the most cogent focused on the effects of excessive individualism in Western societies, and particularly in the United States. The concept of the autonomous individual as the ground of all rights and duties is indeed unique to the liberal West; it has no counterpart in Asia, where people are born into the world encumbered with a whole series of obligations to others, from the family to the state. This encumbrance can inhibit their ability to take advantage of the good things that we associate with individualism, like innovation and entrepreneurship; but it can also reduce their susceptibility to the bad things, like crime and illegitimacy.

How does this play out in practice? Many modern Asian societies have followed a completely different evolutionary path from Europe and North America. Beginning approximately in the mid-1960's, virtually every country in the industrialized West experienced a rapid increase in crime rates and a breakdown in the nuclear family. The only two countries in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development *not* experiencing this disruption were the Asian ones, Japan and Korea.

Since the end of World War II, Japan has shown but a slightly rising divorce rate, while its rate of illegitimacy has been both low and flat, and its crime rate, already one of the lowest in the world, has trended slightly *downward* for the past three decades. Korea underwent a slight rise in crime in the 1970's and has experienced periodic outbreaks of political violence, but there, too, very little social dysfunction has attended industrialization.

Similarly with the countries of Southeast Asia. As their per-capita income has risen, they have experienced *declining* rates of both divorce and illegitimacy. To be sure, traditional family structure has changed dramatically, as joint and multigenerational families have turned into nuclear ones; but the breakdown of the nuclear family that is so notable in the West has been all but absent.

Any number of factors may be adduced to explain why these social trends in Asia differ from those in the United States and other Western countries. But, from the perspective of "Asian values," the most important difference—and the one that has yet to be confronted squarely—has to do with the role of women. Here, indeed, is an example of a social value with large effects both in economic life and in politics.

To a much greater extent than in the West, women in Japan and Korea, not to mention in other, less-developed Asian societies, continue to be treated differently from men both in social custom and in law. While female labor-force participation can be high, girls generally work only until they are married, and then drop out to raise families. Women across Asia are also less able to control their own reproductive cycles. Even in Japan, the pill was only recently made legally available.

Until recently, too, Japanese labor laws prohibited women from working double shifts in factories; they were thus effectively barred from the fabled lifetime-employment system of large Japanese corporations. And what has been true of Japan tends to be even truer in the more socially conservative parts of Asia: in one way or another, women are prevented from earning enough to support themselves and their children without a husband.

When Asian spokesmen (at least the male ones) say they do not like Western values, what they often mean is that they do not like Western sexual

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roles; the individualism that is problematic for them includes not only freewheeling political protest but freewheeling protest within the family. And no wonder: family structure has implications for education, for economic performance, for public safety, and for government investment in such things as crime prevention and health care. Through the selective application of "Asian values," Asian societies have so far preserved the coherence of the nuclear family and have spared themselves the social disruption that has attended economic change in the West.

V

BUT WHAT of the future? In the long run, there is no reason to think that the nations of Asia cannot resume, if at a slower pace, the trajectory they were on prior to last summer's crisis. It is much less certain, however, that their economic and political institutions will be able to withstand the powerful forces of globalization. If they are to remain competitive, for example, the Japanese *keiretsu* and the Korean *chaebol* will have to undergo massive changes in the next decade. In Northeast Asia, the regulatory hand of the state will have to be relaxed; in Southeast Asia, in order to guarantee the soundness of the financial sector, it will have to be strengthened. All Asian countries will need to rethink the wisdom of pegging their currencies tightly to the U.S. dollar.

A likely result of these and other changes will be an erosion of Asia's social distinctiveness, which is already under siege by a variety of factors. Fertility rates in Japan and Korea are far below replacement levels, and Japan in particular faces not only an older but a dramatically shrinking population. If the country wants to see some semblance of economic growth, it will have to expand its labor force, either through immigration or through allowing more women to work. Caught between these two choices, many Japanese would, I suspect, opt for the latter. But this means that, over time, Japan too will begin to experience Western-style family disruption, and the social problems that grow out of it.

In short, what the current crisis will end up doing is to puncture the idea of Asian exceptionalism. The laws of economics have not been suspended in Asia; as the economies of the region catch up to the West, growth rates will slow and social problems will accumulate. And neither have the laws of politics: the well-documented correlation between stable democracy and a high level of development surely applies to a region where rising educational achievements and the complex nature of industrial or post-industrial societies will increasingly favor the rule of law and greater popular participation.

In order to get to the long run, however, we must first survive the short run. In the near term, most countries in Asia will face a severe challenge restructuring their economies without generating a political backlash, and all sorts of uncertainties may complicate the process of recovery. The likely future behavior of the PRC and North Korea is one such unknown. Another is the reaction in the United States. As Asia's fallen tigers try to export their way back to health on the basis of depreciated currencies, America's trade deficit will swell, increasing the pressure for protectionism already evident in the defeat of the Clinton administration's effort to secure "fast-track" trade legislation. On top of all that, there has already been an upsurge of resentment against the IMF and the United States in Korea, Thailand, and other economically prostrate countries.

The remaining years of the 20th century thus promise to be difficult and eventful ones for people on both sides of the Pacific. It would be nice if, for the duration, we could be spared further lectures either about the special advantages or about the special deficiencies of Asian values.

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Was There a Big Bang?

David Berlinski

SCIENCE IS a congeries of great quests, and cosmology is the grandest of the great quests. Taking as its province the universe as a whole, cosmology addresses the old, the ineradicable questions about space and time, nature and destiny. It is not a subject for the tame or the timid.

For the first half of the 20th century, cosmology remained a discipline apart, as a clutch of talented but otherworldly physicists peeped inconclusively at a universe they could barely see: Albert Einstein, of course; the Dutch mathematician Willem de Sitter; the Belgian abbot Georges Lemaître; and the extraordinary Russian mathematician and meteorologist Aleksandr Friedmann, destined to die young, or so the story has it, from exposure to the elements suffered while soaring above Moscow in a weather balloon.

When in 1917 Einstein published his first estimates of the size and shape of the universe, telescopes could not penetrate the heavens beyond the Milky Way. Like a sailor endeavoring to measure the depth of the sea from the shore, astronomers lacked the means to probe the heavens further or to probe them in detail.

This has now changed. Information pours from the night skies, terrestrial telescopes hissing and clicking as they rotate to survey distant galaxies. Somewhere in space, the realigned Hubble telescope peers into the unpolluted depths. Physicists have pictures of the backside of beyond, and they appear to have overheard the cosmic cackle that accompanied the very crack of time, as nothingness gave way to light. The cosmologists have come into their own, handling the universe with an easy familiarity and writing book after book in which they explain in exuberant detail how the great things were done.

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The Great Cause

WHATEVER THE dreams we dream, the existence of the universe has always seemed a riddle beyond reason, if only because our imagination is forever suspended between ideas of creation and timelessness. Many ancient myths depict the universe as the effect of some Great Cause. In the Babylonian epic *Enuma Elish*, existence is attributed to congress between "primordial Aspu, the Begetter" and "Mummu-Tiamet, she who bore them all." Although the connection cosmic and sexual energies is both familiar and disturbing, it is not congress between gods that is crucial to the myth but the idea that the universe came into being as the result of a Great Cause. And this idea is conveyed by the opening of Genesis as well: "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth."

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These are words that express an authentically universal concept, one familiar to every culture. But while the concept of creation is common, it is also incoherent. "I venture to ask," the 3rd-century Chinese sage Kuo Hsiang ventured to ask, "whether the Creator is or is not. If He is not, how can He create things? And if He is, then (being one of these things) He is incapable (without self-creation) of creating the mass of bodily forms." That this argument is simple is no reason to think it wrong.

If not creation by a Great Cause, what, then, of timelessness: a universe proceeding sedately from everlasting to everlasting? In Maori myth, the world parents who bring the cosmos into being arise themselves from *po*, a kind of antecedent gruel or stuff, so that the universe appears as an episode in an infinitely extended drama. Some variant of this idea is also universal, a place in every culture where the weary mind takes refuge. Yet if timelessness offers an escape from the paradoxes of creation, the escape can easily seem an evasion. An everlasting universe is itself an object requiring explanation: if it is unprofitable to ask *when* it arose, one nonetheless wonders why the damn thing should be there at all.

It is the remarkable claim of contemporary cosmology to have broken, and broken decisively, the restless movement of the mind as it passes from theory to theory and from myth to myth. "Incomplete though it may be," one physicist has written, "the scope of modern scientific understanding of the cosmos is truly dazzling." This is not hyperbole. It is an assessment widely shared among physicists, and thus the standard by which their claims must be judged.

The universe, cosmologists now affirm, came into existence as the expression of an explosion, the cosmos shaking itself into existence from the bang of an initial singularity. It is tempting to think of the event in humanly comprehensible terms—a *gigantic* explosion or a *stupendous* eruption, as if, popcorn in hand, we were watching the show from far away. But this is absurd. The Big Bang was not an event taking place at a time or in a place. Space and time were themselves created by the Big Bang, the measure along with the measured.

As far as most physicists are concerned, the Big Bang is now a part of the structure of serene indubitability created by modern physics, an event undeniable as the volcanic explosion at Krakatoa. From time to time, it is true, the astrophysical journals report the failure of observation to confirm the grand design. It hardly matters. The physicists have not only persuaded themselves of the merits of Big Bang cosmology, they have persuaded everyone else as well. The Big Bang has come to signify virtually a universal creed; men and women who know nothing of cosmology are convinced that the rumble of creation lies within reach of their collective memory.

The Cosmic Archeologist

LOOKING AT a few shards of pottery on the desert floor, the archeologist is capable of conjuring up the hanging gardens of the past, the smell of myrrh and honey in the air. His is an act of intellectual reconstruction, one made poignant by the fact that the civilization from which the artifacts spring lies forever beyond the reach of anything but remembrance and the imagination. Cosmology on the grand scale is another form of archeology; the history of the cosmos reveals itself in layers, like the strata of an ancient city.

The world of human artifacts makes sense against the assumption of a continuous human culture. The universe is something else: an old, eerie place with no continuous culture available to enable us to make sense of what we see. It is the hypothesis that the universe is *expanding* that has given cosmologists a unique degree of confidence as they climb down the cliffs of time.

A universe that is expanding is a universe with a clear path into the past. If things are now far apart, they must at one point have been close together; and if things were once close together, they must at one point have been *hotter* than they are now, the contraction of space acting to compress its constituents like a vise, and so increase their energy. The retreat into the past ends at an initial singularity, a state in which material particles are at *no* distance from each other and the temperature, density, and curvature of the universe are infinite.

The cosmic archeologist may now be observed crawling back up the cliffs of time he so recently descended. During the first 10^{-43} seconds after the Big Bang—10^{-43} is one over a ten followed by 42 zeros—both matter and radiation fill the void. A reign of fluid interchange obtains, with particles of matter and antimatter exchanging identities. As the primitive goo of the cosmos—what the physicist George Gamow called *ylem*, the primordial stuff—continues to expand, it continues to cool. Neutrinos, photons, electrons, positrons, neutrons, and protons agitate themselves throughout space. With the temperature dropping, the neutrinos decamp for parts unknown.

At roughly one-and-one-half seconds after the Big Bang, protons and neutrons lose the ability to exchange identities, and the ratio of neutrons to

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protons in the universe freezes itself at one to six. Three-and-one-half seconds later, the equilibrium between electrons and positrons collapses, and the positrons follow the neutrinos into the void.

Three minutes pass. The era of nucleosynthesis begins thereafter. Those neutrons that during the freeze-out found themselves bound to the world's vagrant protons now take up an identity as a form of helium. Other elements wait patiently for the stars to be born so that they may be cooked in their interiors.

The universe continues to expand, pulse, glow, throb, and moan for 400,000 years more, passing insensibly from a place where radiation predominates to an arena where matter has taken charge and is in command. The temperature is now 4,000 degrees Kelvin. The great era of *recombination* is at hand, a burst of cosmic creativity recorded in the walls of time. Free electrons and protons form hydrogen. The interaction between matter and radiation changes dramatically.

Until recombination, photons found themselves trapped within a cosmic pinball machine, ricocheting from one free charged particle to another, the cosmos frustratingly opaque because frustratingly dense. But hydrogen binds the cosmic debris, and for the first time, light streams from one side of creation to the other. The early universe fills with low-temperature blackbody radiation, the stuff destined to be observed fifteen billion years later in Princeton, New Jersey, as cosmic background radiation (CBR).

The separation of light and matter allows the galaxies to form, gravity binding the drifting dust in space. At last, the universe fills with matter, the stars settling into the sky, the far-flung suns radiating energy, the galaxies spreading themselves throughout the heavens. On the earth that has been newly made, living things shamble out of the warm oceans, the cosmic archeologist himself finally clambering over the lip of time to survey the scene and take notes on all that has occurred.

Such is the standard version of hot Big Bang cosmology—"hot" in contrast to scenarios in which the universe is cold, and "Big Bang" in contrast to various steady-state cosmologies in which nothing ever begins and nothing ever quite ends. It may seem that this archeological scenario leaves unanswered the question of *how* the show started and merely describes the consequences of some Great Cause that it cannot specify and does not comprehend. But really the question of how the show started answers itself: before the Big Bang there was nothing. *Darkness was upon the face of the deep.*

Blow-Up

NOTWITHSTANDING THE investment made by the scientific community and the general public in contemporary cosmology, a suspicion lingers that matters do not sum up as they should. Cosmologists write as if they are quite certain of the Big Bang, yet, within the last decade, they have found it necessary to augment the standard view by means of various new theories. These schemes are meant to solve problems that cosmologists were never at pains to acknowledge, so that today they are somewhat in the position of a physician reporting both that his patient has not been ill and that he has been successfully revived.

The details are instructive. It is often said, for example, that the physicists Arno Penzias and Robert Wilson observed the remnants of the Big Bang when in 1962 they detected, by means of a hum in their equipment, a signal in the night sky they could not explain. This is not quite correct. What Penzias and Wilson *observed* was simply the same irritating and ineradicable noise that has been a feature of every electrical appliance I have ever owned. What theoreticians like Robert Dicke *inferred* was something else: a connection between that cackle and the cosmic background radiation released into the universe after the era of recombination.

The cosmic hum is real enough, and so, too, is the fact that the universe is bathed in background radiation. But the era of recombination is a shimmer by the doors of theory, something known indirectly and only by means of its effects. And therein lies a puzzle. Although Big Bang cosmology does predict that the universe should be bathed in a milky film of radiation, it makes no predictions about the uniformity of its temperature. Yet, looking at the sky in every direction, cosmologists have discovered that the CBR has the same temperature, to an accuracy of one part in 100,000.

Why should this be so? CBR filled the universe some 400,000 years after the Big Bang; if its temperature thereafter is utterly and entirely the same, some physical agency must have brought this about. But by the time of recombination, the Big Bang had blown up the universe to a diameter of 90,000,000 light years. A physical signal—a light beam, say—sent hustling into the cosmos at Time Zero would, a mere 400,000 years later, be hustling still; by far the greater part of the universe would be untouched by its radiance, and so uninfluenced by the news that it carried. Since, by Einstein's theory of special relativity, nothing can travel faster than light itself, it fol-

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lows that no physical agency would have had time enough to establish the homogeneity of the CBR, which appears in Big Bang cosmology as an arbitrary feature of the early universe, something that must be assumed and is not explained.

THEORIES OF *inflation* now make a useful appearance. Their animating idea represents a contribution to cosmology from particle physics—a rare example of intellectual lend-lease, and evidence that disciplines dealing with the smallest of objects may be relevant to disciplines dealing with the largest. Within what is now known as the Standard Model, the familiar arrangement in which elementary particles are moved by various forces gives way to a mathematically more general scheme in which fields replace both particles and forces as essential theoretical structures. A field is an expanse or expression of space, something like a surface in two dimensions, or the atmosphere in three, or space and time in four. The Standard Model in particle physics consists of a dozen or so fields, exchanging energy with one another and subsidizing particles by means of the energy they contain.

It is the Higgs field that originally came to play a novel role in Big Bang cosmology. Named after Peter Higgs, the Scottish physicist who charmed it into existence, the Higgs field is purely a conjectured object. Its cosmological potential was first noted by a young American physicist, Alan Guth.

Fields are structures that carry latent energy even under conditions in which the space they control is to all intents and purposes empty. The natural and stable state of the Higgs field is one in which its latent energy is at a minimum. Such is its true vacuum state, the word "vacuum" indicating that the field is empty, and the word "true" that the field is in its lowest energy configuration. But under certain physically possible circumstances, the Higgs field can find itself adventitiously trapped in a *false* vacuum state, a condition in which, like a spring, it is loaded with potential energy. It is thus, Guth conjectured, that the Higgs field might have found itself fluttering about the early universe, energetically throbbing and dying to be of use.

The wish is father to the act. The energy within the Higgs field is repulsive: it pushes things apart. When released, it contributes a massive jolt to the process of cosmic expansion already under way. The universe very quickly doubles in size. Space and time stretch themselves out. Particles zoom from one another. If the ordinary course of cosmic expansion is linear, inflationary expansion is exponential, like the gaunt, hollow-eyed guest gobbling the hors d'oeuvres—and everything else—at a previously decorous cocktail party. Only as the Higgs field tumbles down to its true vacuum state does inflation come to a halt, and the ordinary course of the Big Bang resume.

The mechanism of inflation, cosmologists cheerfully admit, is rather like one of those Rube Goldberg contraptions in which a door is made to open by means of a sequence that includes a flashing neon light, an insulting message in a bottle, a prizefighter wearing patent-leather shoes, and a boa constrictor with an aversion to milk. Nonetheless, they add, inflation provides a natural and plausible explanation for the fact that the CBR is uniform in temperature. If the universe under standard Big Bang cosmology is too large to allow a coordinating physical signal to reach every part of the CBR, then one redemptive idea is to cast around for a universe smaller than the standard one. This, inflation provides. Within an inflationary universe, the CBR owes its uniform temperature to the fact that it has been thoroughly mixed. At the end of the era of recombination, the CBR then surges through space like pre-warmed soup.

Inflation is an idea that has gripped the community of cosmologists. Whether it has advanced their scientific agenda is another question. As we have seen, standard Big Bang cosmology requires that features of the early universe such as the temperature of the CBR be set arbitrarily. This has seemed intellectually repugnant to many physicists: the goal of science is to reduce the arbitrariness of description. But inflationary cosmology has arbitrary features of its own, which, displaced from one corner of the theory, have a habit of popping up in another. "The need for fine-tuning of the universe," the physicist David Lindley observed of Guth's proposal, "has been obviated by fine-tuning the Higgs mechanism instead." So it has.

Soon after its introduction, Guth's model of inflation required adjustment. The Higgs field has been replaced by scalar fields, which, as Guth admits, "in many cases serve no function other than the driving of inflation." These fields must be carefully chosen if they are to do their work, a fact that Guth again honestly acknowledges: "Their nature cannot be deduced from known physics, and their detailed properties have to be hypothesized."

In an interesting example of inflationary theory self-applied, inflationary fields have undergone an exponential increase of their own. Beyond mere inflation, the sort of thing that with great heartiness simply blows the universe up, there is chaotic inflation and even "eternal inflation," both of them the creations of the cosmologist Andrei Linde. Almost

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all cosmologists have a favored scheme; when not advancing their own, they occupy themselves enumerating the deficiencies of the others.

Red Stars at Night

STREAMING IN from space, light reaches the earth like a river rich in information, the stars in the sky having inscribed strange and secret messages on its undulations. The universe is very large, light has always whispered; the nearest galaxy to our own—Andromeda—is more than two million light years away. But the universe has also seemed relatively static, and this, too, light suggests, the stars appearing where they have always appeared, the familiar dogs and bears and girdled archers of the constellations making their appointed rounds in the sky each night.

More than anything else, it is this impression that Big Bang cosmology rejects. The cool gray universe, current dogma holds, is a place of extraordinary violence, the galaxies receding from one another, the skin of creation stretching at every spot in space, the whole colossal structure blasting apart with terrible force. And this message is inscribed in light as well.

In one of its incarnations, light represents an undulation of the electromagnetic field; its source is the excitable atom itself, with electrons bouncing from one orbit to another and releasing energy as a result. Each atom has a spectral signature, a distinctive electromagnetic frequency. The light that streams in from space thus reveals something about the composition of the galaxies from which it was sent.

In the 1920's, the characteristic signature of hydrogen was detected in various far-flung galaxies. And then an odd discovery was made. Examining a very small sample of twenty or so galaxies, the American astronomer V. M. Slipher observed that the frequency of the hydrogen they sent into space was shifted to the red portion of the spectrum. It was an extraordinary observation, achieved by means of primitive equipment. Using a far more sophisticated telescope, Edwin Hubble made the same discovery in the late 1920's after Slipher had (foolishly) turned his attention elsewhere.

The galactic redshift, Hubble realized, was an exceptionally vivid cosmic clue, a bit of evidence from far away and long ago, and like all clues its value lay in the questions it prompted. Why should galactic light be shifted to the red and not the blue portions of the spectrum? Why, for that matter, should it be shifted at all?

An invigorating stab in the dark now followed. The pitch of a siren is altered as a police car disappears down the street, the sound waves carrying the noise stretched by the speed of the car itself. This is the familiar Doppler effect. Something similar, Hubble conjectured, might explain the redshift of the galaxies, with the distortions in their spectral signature arising as a reflection of their recessional velocity as they disappeared into the depths.

Observations and inferences resolved themselves into a quantitative relationship. The redshift of a galaxy, cosmologists affirm, and so its recessional velocity, is proportional to its distance and inversely proportional to its apparent brightness or flux. The relationship is known as Hubble's law, even though Hubble himself regarded the facts at his disposal with skepticism.

Hubble's law anchors Big Bang cosmology to the real world. Many astronomers have persuaded themselves that the law represents an observation, almost as if, peering through his telescope, Hubble had noticed the galaxies zooming off into the far distance. This is nonsense. Hubble's law consolidates a number of very plausible intellectual steps. The light streaming in from space is relieved of its secrets by means of ordinary and familiar facts, but even after the facts are admitted into evidence, the relationship among the redshift of the galaxies, their recessional velocity, and their distance represents a complicated inference, an intellectual leap.

THE BIG BANG rests on the hypothesis that the universe is expanding, and in the end the plausibility of its claims will depend on whether the universe *is* expanding. Astronomers can indeed point to places in the sky where the redshift of the galaxies appears to be a linear function of their distance. But in astrophysics, as in evolutionary biology, it is failure rather than success that is of significance. The astrophysical literature contains interesting and disturbing evidence that the linear relationship at the heart of Hubble's law by no means describes the facts fully.

At the end of World War II, astronomers discovered places in the sky where charged particles moving in a magnetic field sent out strong signals in the radio portion of the spectrum. Twenty years later, Alan Sandage and Thomas Mathews identified the source of such signals with optically discernible points in space. These are the quasars—*quasi stellar radio sources.*

Quasars have played a singular role in astrophysics. In the mid-1960's, Maarten Schmidt discovered that their spectral lines were shifted massively to the red. If Hubble's law were correct,

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quasars should be impossibly far away, hurtling themselves into oblivion at the far edge of space and time. But for more than a decade, the American astronomer Halton Arp has drawn the attention of the astronomical community to places in the sky where the expected relationship between redshift and distance simply fails. Embarrassingly enough, many quasars seem bound to nearby galaxies. The results are in plain sight: there on the photographic plate is the smudged record of a galaxy, and there next to it is a quasar, the points of light lined up and looking for all the world as if they were equally luminous.

These observations do not comport with standard Big Bang cosmology. If quasars have very large redshifts, they must (according to Hubble's law) be very far away; if they *seem* nearby, then either they must be fantastically luminous or their redshift has not been derived from their velocity. The tight tidy series of inferences that has gone into Big Bang cosmology, like leverage in commodity trading, works beautifully in reverse, physicists like speculators finding their expectations canceled by the very processes they had hoped to exploit.

Acknowledging the difficulty, some theoreticians have proposed that quasars have been caught in the process of evolution. Others have scrupled at Arp's statistics. Still others have claimed that his samples are too small, although they have claimed this for every sample presented and will no doubt continue to claim this when the samples number in the billions. But whatever the excuses, a great many cosmologists recognize that quasars mark a point where the otherwise silky surface of cosmological evidence encounters a snag.

WITHIN ANY scientific discipline, bad news must come in battalions before it is taken seriously. Cosmologists can point to any number of cases in which disconcerting evidence has resolved itself in their favor; a decision to regard the quasars with a watchful indifference is not necessarily irrational. The galaxies are another matter. They are central to Hubble's law; it is within the context of galactic observation that the crucial observational evidence for the Big Bang must be found or forged.

The battalions now begin to fill. The American mathematician I.E. Segal and his associates have studied the evidence for galactic recessional velocity over the course of twenty years, with results that are sharply at odds with predictions of Big Bang cosmology. Segal is a distinguished, indeed a great mathematician, one of the creators of modern function theory and a member of the National Academy of Sciences. He has incurred the indignation of the astrophysical community by suggesting broadly that their standards of statistical rigor would shame a sociologist. Big Bang cosmology, he writes,

> owes its acceptance as a physical principle primarily to the uncritical and premature representation of [the redshift-distance relationship] as an empirical fact. . . . Observed discrepancies . . . have been resolved by a pyramid of exculpatory assumptions, which are inherently incapable of noncircular substantiation.

These are strong words of remonstration, but they are not implausible. Having constructed an elaborate scientific orthodoxy, cosmologists have acquired a vested interest in its defense. The astrophysicists J.G. Hoessell, J.E. Gunn, and T.X. Thuan, for example, report with satisfaction that within the structures described by G.O. Abell's *Catalog of Bright Cluster Galaxies* (1958), prediction and observation cohere perfectly to support Hubble's law. Abell's catalog is a standard astronomical resource, used by cosmologists everywhere—but it is useless as evidence for Hubble's law. "In determining whether a cluster meets selection criterion," Abell affirms, "it was assumed that their redshifts were proportional to their distance." If this is what Abell *assumed*, there is little point in asking what conclusions he *derived*.

The fact that the evidence in favor of Hubble's law may be biased does not mean that it is untrue; bias may suggest nothing more than a methodological flaw. But Segal is persuaded that when the evidence is soberly considered, it *does* contravene accepted doctrine, statistical sloppiness functioning, as it so often does, simply to conceal the facts.

A statistical inference is compelling only if the samples upon which it rests are objectively compelling. Objectivity, in turn, requires that the process of sampling be both reasonably complete and unbiased. Segal and his colleagues have taken pains to study samples that within the limits of observation are both. Their most recent study contains a detailed parallel analysis of Hubble's law across four wave bands, one that essentially surveys all stellar objects within each band. The analysis is based on new data drawn from the G. de Vaucoleurs survey of bright cluster galaxies, which includes more than 10,000 galaxies. Hubble's own analysis, it is worthwhile to recall, was limited to twenty galaxies.

The results of their analysis are disturbing. The linear relationship that Hubble saw, Segal and his collaborators cannot see and have not found. Rather, the relationship between redshift and flux or apparent brightness that they have studied in a

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large number of complete samples satisfies a quadratic law, the redshift varying as the square of apparent brightness. "By normal standards of scientific due process," Segal writes, "the results of [Big Bang] cosmology are illusory."

Cosmologists have dismissed Segal's claims with a great snort of indignation. But the discrepancy from Big Bang cosmology that they reveal is hardly trivial. Like evolutionary biologists, cosmologists are often persuaded that they are in command of a structure intellectually powerful enough to accommodate gross discrepancies in the data. This is a dangerous and deluded attitude. Hubble's law embodies a general hypothesis of Big Bang cosmology—namely, that the universe is expanding—and while the law cannot be established by observation, observation *can* establish that it may be false. A statistically responsible body of contravening evidence has revealed something more than an incidental defect. Indifference to its implications amounts to a decision to place Big Bang cosmology beyond rational inquiry.

Monlam Chemno

WHATEVER THE facts may be, the Big Bang is also an event informed by the majesty of a great physical theory. Einstein published the equations for general relativity in 1915, and more than 80 years later, general relativity remains the only theoretical instrument remotely adequate to the representation of the universe as a whole.

General relativity is first and fundamentally an account of gravity, the force that pulls ballerinas to the ground and that fixes the planets in elliptical orbits around the sun. At the beginning of the scientific era, Isaac Newton described a universe in which space and time are absolute. The measured beating of a great clock is heard, and it is heard everywhere at once. Particles move within the unchanging vault of space. Material objects attract one another with a force proportional to their mass and inversely proportional to the square of the distance between them.

A metaphysical reorganization is required before Newton's caterpillar can emerge as Einstein's butterfly. The elements of general relativity are physical *processes*, a word signifying something that starts at one time and at one place and that ends at another time and another place, and so crawls along a continuum whose intrinsic structure has four dimensions. Within the arena of these physical processes, the solid structures of the Newtonian universe undergo a dissolution. The great vault of space and the uniformly beating heart dwindle and then disappear: *this* universe is one in which space and time have fused themselves into a single entity, and *its* heart is an ever-changing but reciprocating relationship between space-time and matter. Material objects direct the space and time that surround them to curve, much as a bowling ball deforms the mattress on which it rests; the curvature of space-time determines the path undertaken by physical processes, much as an ant crawling on that mattress must travel a curved path to get where it is going.

Newtonian gravity acts at a distance and as a force, the very bowels of the earth reaching to enfold an object and pull it down. But while Newton was able quantitatively to describe how gravity acts, he was unable to say why it acts at all, the aching attraction of matter for matter having no other explanation than the fact that it is so. General relativity provides an explanation of gravity in terms of the curvature of space and time. No forces are involved, and none is invoked, but gravity nonetheless emerges in this universe as a natural expression of the way the cosmos is constructed.

Freely moving objects, Einstein assumed, follow a path covering the shortest distance between points in space and time. Within the ambit of a large material object, the shortest distance between such points is curved. Ballerinas accelerate toward the center of the earth after being thrown upward by their partners because acceleration is required by the geometry in which they are embedded. In this fashion, gravity disappears as a force but remains as a fact.

If the analysis of gravity is at the center of general relativity, the intellectual tools responsible for its analysis—the equations that describe the ever-changing relationship between curvature and material objects—are responsible as well for its local character. For many years, the most precise and most interesting tests of the theory were conducted within the narrow confines of our own solar system. Cosmology, however, is a *global* study, one in which the universe itself is the object of contemplation, and not any of its parts. The conveyance from the local structure of the universe (the sun, the solar system) to the universe as a whole must be negotiated by a daring series of inferences.

In describing matter on a cosmic scale, cosmologists strip the stars and planets, the great galaxies and the bright bursting supernovae, of their uniqueness as places and things and replace them with an imaginary distribution: the matter of the universe is depicted as a great but uniform and homogeneous cloud covering the cosmos equitably

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in all its secret places. Cosmologists make this assumption because they must. There is no way to deal with the universe object by object; the equations would be inscrutable, impossible to solve. But however useful the assumption of homogeneity may be mathematically, it is false in the straightforward sense that the distribution of matter in the universe is not homogeneous at all.

Having simplified the contents of the universe, the cosmologist must take care as well, and for the same reason, to strip from the matter that remains any suggestion of particularity or preference in place. The universe, he must assume, is isotropic. It has no center whatsoever, no place toward which things tend, and no special direction or axis of coordination. The thing looks much the same wherever it is observed.

The twin assumptions that the universe is homogeneous and isotropic are not ancillary but indispensable to the hypothesis of an expanding universe; without them, no conclusion can mathematically be forthcoming. Together, these two assumptions are like the figured bass needed to chant what in Tibetan is known as *Monlam Chemno*, the great prayer to the cosmos.

Specification in the Dark

AN EQUATION draws the noose of an identity between two or more items. The field equations of general relativity draw that noose between curvature (the metric structure of the universe) and matter (its stress-energy tensor). But it is one thing to specify an equation, and quite another to solve it.

The mathematician in him having taken command, Einstein endeavored in 1917 to provide cosmological solutions for the field equations of his own theory. He struggled with increasing vexation. The models he was able to derive indicated that the radius of the universe was either expanding or contracting; it was a conclusion that offended his aesthetic sensibilities. By adding a parameter to his equations—the so-called cosmological constant—he was in the end able to discover a static solution, one that revealed a universe finite in extent, but unbounded, like the surface of a sphere. This static solution has a habit of dropping from the view of cosmologists, who routinely aver that Einstein's theory of general relativity uniquely specifies an expanding universe. Not so.

Einstein had hoped that the equations of general relativity would determine a single world model, or cosmic blueprint. In this he was destined to be disappointed. Months after he discovered one solution of the field equations, Willem de Sitter discovered another. In de Sitter's universe, there is no matter whatsoever, the place looking rather like a dance hall in which the music can be heard but no dancers seen, radiation filling the empty spaces and ricocheting from one end of creation to another.

In the 1920's, both Aleksandr Friedmann and Georges Lemaître discovered the solutions to the field equations that have dominated cosmology ever since, their work coming to amalgamate itself into a single denomination as Friedmann-Lemaître (FL) cosmology. Gone from their models is the cosmological constant (although it is resurrected in various inflation scenarios), and as a result the universe breathes voluptuously, its radius expanding or contracting with time.

FL cosmology does not assign to the universe a unique geometrical identity, or specify its fate forever; general relativity is mathematically compatible with a number of different physical scenarios. Like the surface of a sphere, the universe may well be closed, the whole thing falling back on itself at the end of time. A certain symmetry prevails, the life of things and all the drama of creation caught between two singularities as the universe traces a trajectory in which its initial effervescent explosion is followed by a subsequent enervating contraction.

Or yet again, the universe may well be open, space and time forever gushing into the void but with ever-decreasing intensity, like an athlete panting in shallow breaths. Such a universe is purely a mathematician's world, one seen only by the exercise of certain obscure mental muscles, and regarded by physicists (and everyone else) with glum distaste.

Or, finally, the universe may be one that occupies the Euclidean space of high-school textbooks and intuition alike, balanced precariously but balanced forever on a knife's edge between expansion and contraction.

If its predictive capacities seem unstable, FL cosmology has other peculiarities as well. Whatever the specific form its solutions take, they are alike in assigning dynamic properties to the universe as a whole. The classical distinction between the eternal vault of space and time and its entirely perishable contents has disappeared. The universe in FL cosmology is *itself* bound to the wheel of being, with space and time no more permanent than water and air. Light blazes, the show commences, and like some magnificent but mysterious organism, the universe expands with an exuberant rush of energy and floods nothingness with the seeds of

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being. In this fundamental respect, FL cosmology breaks both with tradition and with common sense.

At Time Zero

THE INTERPRETATION of a physical theory partakes of a dark art, one in which mathematical concepts are ceded dominion over the physical world. In practicing this art, the mathematician, like the necromancer that he is, is always liable to the temptation of confusing the structures over which he presides with things in the real world.

On the assumption—on the *assumption*—that the universe is expanding, it is irresistibly tempting to run time backward until the far-flung debris of the cosmos collects itself back into a smaller and smaller area. It seems evident, though, that this process of contraction and collapse may be continued only so far. An apple may be divided in halves, and then thirds, and then quarters, but even though the mathematical sequence of one half, one third, one fourth, and so on contains infinitely many terms, and converges ultimately to zero, the apple itself may be divided only finitely many times.

This straightforward point has been the source of grave confusion. "The universe," the astronomer Joseph Silk writes, "began at time zero in a state of infinite density." It is there that (by definition) a *singularity* may be found. "Of course," Silk adds, "the phrase 'a state of infinite density' is completely unacceptable as a physical description of the universe. . . . An infinitely dense universe [is] where the laws of physics, and even space and time, break down."

These are not words that inspire confidence. Does the phrase "a state of infinite density" describe a physical state of affairs or not? If it does, the description is uninformative by virtue of being "completely unacceptable." If it does not, the description is uninformative by virtue of being completely irrelevant. But if the description is either unacceptable or irrelevant, what reason is there to believe that the universe began in an initial singularity? Absent an initial singularity, what reason is there to believe that the universe began at all?

When prominent cosmologists tie themselves in knots, charity tends to assign the blame to the medium in which they are navigating—books for a general audience—rather than the message they are conveying. But when it comes to the singularities, the knots form in *every* medium, evidence that the message is at fault and not the other way around. Cosmologists often claim that the mathematicians among them have demonstrated what they themselves may be unable clearly to express. In a passage that is typical, the astrophysicist Kip Thorne writes that "[Stephen] Hawking and [Roger] Penrose in 1970 proved—without any idealizing assumptions—that our universe must have had a space-time singularity at the beginning of its Big Bang expansion." But while it is true that Hawking and Penrose proved something, what they demonstrated remains within the gerbil wheel of mathematics; any additional inference requires a connection that the mathematician is not in a position to provide.

The concept of a singularity belongs *essentially* to mathematics. Singularities are not experimentally accessible objects. They cannot be weighed, measured, assessed, replicated, balanced, or seen by any modality of the senses. Within certain mathematical contexts, the concept has real content. An ordinary curve goes up one side of the blackboard and down the other; it *changes* its direction at a singular point. There are singularities within the calculus, and singularities in complex function theory where imaginary numbers loiter, and singularities in the space of smooth maps. There are singularities within general relativity as well, but the term covers a variety of cases, and the singularities within general relativity are distinctly odd.

In most mathematical theories a natural distinction is drawn between a figure and its background: a curve arcs within the broader ambit of an enveloping space, a mapping is easily distinguished from the spaces it connects. Typically, it is the figure that admits of a singularity: the curve changes its direction or the mapping breaks down, while the background stays the same. But in general relativity, it is the *background* that suffers a singularity, the very fabric of space and time giving way with a rip as curvature zooms off to infinity and space and time contort themselves. For the purposes of describing such singularities, the usual mathematical techniques are unavailing.

That having been said, here is what Hawking and Penrose brought under the control of a mathematical demonstration. The setting is FL cosmology and *only* FL cosmology. There are three kinds of universe to consider, and innumerably many species within each type. Those that are open and forever gushing into the void are called hyperbolic. Within almost all of those hyperbolic universes, almost all processes begin at a point in the past. Within the two types of universe that remain, there is bound to be at least one process that has begun somewhere in the past.

Despite the tics—"almost all," "at least one"—the Penrose-Hawking theorems do indeed demon-

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strate that some universes begin in an initial singularity. But the light thrown by the Penrose-Hawking theorems flickers over a mathematical theory and so a mathematical universe. The universe that we inhabit is a physical system. Nothing but grief can come of confusing the one for the other. FL cosmology requires the existence of space-time singularities, but there is nothing in the Penrose-Hawking theorems to suggest that a space-time singularity corresponds to an explosion, or marks the beginning of an expansion, or describes an accessible portion of space and time, or connects itself to any physical state of affairs whatsoever.

Mathematical concepts achieve physical significance only when the theories in which they are embedded are confirmed by experience. If a space-time singularity is not a physical event, no such confirmation can logically be forthcoming. With the argument rolled backward, it follows that if these mathematical theories are not confirmed by experience, then neither have they achieved any physical significance.

It is Einstein who expressed the most reasonable and deeply thought views on this matter. "One may not therefore assume the validity of the [field] equation for very high density of the field and of matter," he remarked, "and one may not conclude that the beginning of the expansion must mean a singularity in the mathematical sense. All we have to realize is that the equations may not be continued over such regions."

The sharp, clean, bracing light that the Big Bang was to have thrown on the very origins of space and time lapses when it is most needed. The relevant equations of general relativity fall silent at precisely the moment we most wish they would speak.

The Closing Circle

LIKE SO many haunting human stories, the scientific story of the Big Bang is circular in the progression of its ideas and circular thus in its deepest nature. Cosmologists have routinely assumed that the universe is expanding because they have been persuaded of FL cosmology; and they have been persuaded of FL cosmology because they have routinely assumed that the universe is expanding. The pattern would be intellectually convenient if it were intellectually compelling.

If the evidence in favor of Big Bang cosmology is more suspect than generally imagined, its defects are far stronger than generally credited. Whatever else it may be, the universe is a bright, noisy, energetic place. There are monstrously large galaxies in the skies and countlessly many suns burning with fierce thermonuclear fires. Black holes are said to loiter here and there, sucking in matter and light and releasing it slowly in the form of radiation. Whence the energy for the show, the place where accounts are settled? The principles of 19th-century physics require that, in one way or another, accounts *must* be settled. Energy is neither created nor destroyed.

Hot Big Bang cosmology appears to be in violation of the first law of thermodynamics. The global energy needed to run the universe has come from nowhere, and to nowhere it apparently goes as the universe loses energy by cooling itself.

This contravention of thermodynamics expresses, in physical form, a general philosophical anxiety. Having brought space and time into existence, along with everything else, the Big Bang itself remains outside any causal scheme. The creation of the universe remains unexplained by any force, field, power, potency, influence, or instrumentality known to physics—or to man. The whole vast imposing structure organizes itself from absolutely nothing.

This is not simply difficult to grasp. It is incomprehensible.

Physicists, no less than anyone else, are uneasy with the idea that the universe simply popped into existence, with space and time "suddenly switching themselves on." The image of a light switch comes from Paul Davies, who uses it to express a miracle without quite recognizing that it embodies a contradiction. A universe that has *suddenly* switched itself on has accomplished something within time; and yet the Big Bang is supposed to have brought space and time into existence.

Having entered a dark logical defile, physicists often find it difficult to withdraw. Thus, Alan Guth writes in pleased astonishment that the universe really did arise from "essentially . . . nothing at all": as it happens, a false vacuum patch "10^{-26} centimeters in diameter" and "10^{-32} solar masses." It would appear, then, that "essentially nothing" has both spatial extension and mass. While these facts may strike Guth as inconspicuous, others may suspect that nothingness, like death, is not a matter that admits of degrees.

The attempt to discover some primordial stuff that can be described both as nothing and as something recalls the Maori contemplating the manifold mysteries of *po*. This apparently gives Stephen Hawking pause. "To ask what happened before the universe began," he has written, "is like asking for a point on the Earth at 91 degrees north latitude." We are on the inside of the great sphere of space and

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time, and while we can see to the boundaries, there is nothing beyond to see if only because there is nothing beyond. "Instead of talking about the universe being created, and maybe coming to an end," Hawking writes, "one should just say: the universe is."

Now this is a conclusion to which mystics have always given their assent; but having concluded that the universe just "is," cosmologists, one might think, would wish to know *why* it is. The question that Hawking wishes to evade disappears as a question in physics only to reappear as a question in philosophy; we find ourselves traveling in all the old familiar circles.

Contract

STANDING AT the gate of modern time, Isaac Newton forged the curious social pact by which rational men and women have lived ever since. The description of the physical world would be vouchsafed to a particular institution, that of mathematical physics; and it was to the physicists and not the priests, soothsayers, poets, politicians, novelists, generals, mystics, artists, astrologers, warlocks, wizards, or enchanters that society would look for judgments about the nature of the physical world. If knowledge is power, the physicists have, by this arrangement, been given an enormous privilege. But a social arrangement is among other things a contract: something is given, but something is expected as well. In exchange for their privilege, the physicists were to provide an account of the physical world at once penetrating, general, persuasive, and true.

Until recently, the great physicists have been scrupulous about honoring the terms of their contract. They have attempted with dignity to respect the distinction between what is known and what is not. Even quantum electrodynamics, the most successful theory ever devised, was described honestly by its founder, Richard Feynman, as resting on a number of unwholesome mathematical tricks.

This scrupulousness has lately been compromised. The result has been the calculated or careless erasure of the line separating disciplined physical inquiry from speculative metaphysics. Contemporary cosmologists feel free to say anything that pops into their heads. Unhappy examples are everywhere: absurd schemes to model time on the basis of the complex numbers, as in Stephen Hawking's *A Brief History of Time*; bizarre and ugly contraptions for cosmic inflation; universes multiplying beyond the reach of observation; white holes, black holes, worm holes, and naked singularities; theories of every stripe and variety, all of them uncorrected by any criticism beyond the trivial.

The physicists carry on endlessly because they can. Just recently, for example, Lee Smolin, a cosmologist at the University of Pennsylvania, has offered a Darwinian interpretation of cosmology, a theory of "cosmological natural selection." On Smolin's view, the Big Bang happened within a black hole; new universes are bubbling up all the time, each emerging from its own black hole and each provided with its own set of physical laws, so that the very concept of a law of nature is shown to be a part of the mutability of things.

There is, needless to say, no evidence whatsoever in favor of this preposterous theory. The universes that are bubbling up are unobservable. So, too, are the universes that have bubbled up and those that will bubble up in the future. Smolin's theories cannot be confirmed by experience. Or by anything else. What law of nature could reveal that the laws of nature are contingent? Yet the fact that when Smolin's theory is self-applied it self-destructs has not prevented physicists like Alan Guth, Roger Penrose, and Martin Rees from circumspectly applauding the effort nonetheless.

A scientific crisis has historically been the excuse to which scientists have appealed for the exculpation of damaged doctrines. Smolin is no exception. "We are living," he writes, "through a period of scientific crisis." Ordinary men and women may well scruple at the idea that cosmology is in crisis because cosmologists, deep down, have run out of interesting things to say, but in his general suspicions Smolin is no doubt correct. What we are discovering is that many areas of the universe are apparently protected from our scrutiny, like sensitive files sealed from view by powerful encryption codes. However painful, the discovery should hardly be unexpected. Beyond every act of understanding, there is an abyss.

Like Darwin's theory of evolution, Big Bang cosmology has undergone that curious social process in which a scientific theory is promoted to a secular myth. The two theories serve as points of certainty in an intellectual culture that is otherwise disposed to give the benefit of the doubt to doubt itself. It is within the mirror of these myths that we have come to see ourselves. But if the promotion of theory into myth satisfies one human agenda, it violates another. Myths are quite typically false, and science is concerned with truth. Human beings, it would seem, may make scientific theories or they may make myths, but with respect to the same aspects of experience, they cannot quite do both.

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Feminizing Jewish Studies

Hillel Halkin

ABOUT 30 years have passed since the formal introduction of Jewish studies as an academic discipline on American campuses, and the change has been great. Whereas in the 1950's the number of serious scholars of Judaica in the United States, most of them of European provenance, could almost have been counted on one's fingers, hundreds of American-born and -trained professors and lecturers now teach Jewish religion, history, sociology, literature, rabbinics, and Bible at a large number of American universities. It has been one of the American Jewish community's most impressive cultural achievements.

And most recently, not only a new generation of Jewish scholars but a new school of them has emerged on the American campus. Heavily influenced, like all the liberal arts, by postmodernist thinking; skeptical of traditional Jewish categories of analysis; ranging from non- to anti-Zionist in its attitude toward Israel while strongly affirming Diaspora Jewish identity; and, above all, openly embracing feminism and "feminist theory," it does not yet have a name.

One is tempted to call it "the California school," since several of its leading representatives—David Biale, Chana Kronfeld, Naomi Seidman, Howard Eilberg-Schwartz, and Daniel Boyarin—teach at institutions in that state, and Boyarin, a professor of "talmudic culture" at Berkeley, is arguably the trend's brightest star. But since its proponents can be found at universities everywhere, this would be a misnomer.

Let us simply call it, then, "the new Jewish scholarship." It forms the latest chapter in the modern writing of Jewish history, which began in the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* or "science-of-Judaism" movement in early 19th-century Germany. Indeed, starting with Zechariah Frankel (1801-75), a historian of rabbinics, an uninterrupted chain of teacher-student relationships leads to an academic like Boyarin by way of such eminent scholars as Heinrich Graetz (1817-91), David Heinrich Mueller (1846-1912), Jacob Nahum Epstein (1878-1952), and Saul Lieberman (1898-1983), the last of whom was Boyarin's mentor in Talmud at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York. And yet the new scholarship constitutes a radical break with the *Wissenschaft* tradition. Although men like Frankel, Graetz, Mueller, and Epstein had good reason to feel that those trained by them were following in their footsteps, it is safe to say—as Boyarin himself acknowledges—that someone like Lieberman would have been appalled by Boyarin's books.

Of course, "paradigm shifts," to use the now-fashionable term for a major change of focus in an

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intellectual discipline, have occurred before in Jewish historiography. Perhaps the most conspicuous took place in association with Zionism, under whose impact leading 20th-century historians, many connected with the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, reinterpreted a wide variety of religious and cultural phenomena from the Jewish past, casting them as forms of incipient nationalism: proto-Zionist strivings in times when the circumstances were not ripe for their mature expression. Diaspora existence, generally evaluated positively by the earlier *Wissenschaft*, was seen by the Jerusalem school as a long struggle against exilic conditions that alienated Jews from their outer surroundings and inner potential.

But even as the Jerusalem school was rewriting Jewish history, it went on sharing basic premises with its predecessors. Like them, it believed historical truth to be objective and empirically verifiable. Like them, too, it portrayed the Jewish people as an organic unity in time and space, the evolving bearer of a core identity that remained unchanged in essence despite the historical and geographical guises worn and shed by it. Although the goal to which Jewish history was seen as moving was now different—the reconstitution of a scattered people in its land, rather than the original *Wissenschaft*'s notion of an ever more refined ethical monotheism spread by Israel among the nations—the Jerusalem school, too, viewed Jewish history teleologically. And, like the scholars who preceded it, it also emphasized Jewish uniqueness, dwelling more on the differences than on the similarities between Diaspora Jews and their host nations. It was such analogies that caused Gershom Scholem, the great scholar of Kabbalah, to remark of himself and his Hebrew University colleagues: "We came to rebel and ended up by continuing."

ALL OF these commonalities are rejected by the new Jewish scholars. In good postmodernist fashion, objective historical truth is, for them, an epistemological illusion, the past being an inevitable "reinvention" of the present by self-interested and conceptually predisposed observers. Instead of unity, they discern there discontinuity and conflict, leading them to dismiss as an artificial construct any idea of a single "essentialist" Jewish people or religion. Ruling out the search for direction in Jewish history, they view such old-fashioned "narratives" as disguised exercises of power, attempts by dominant groups of Jews throughout the ages to assert "hegemony" over other Jews. And while not denying that Jews have been different from others, the new scholars are more interested in their similarity to such groups as oppressed and colonized peoples, women, and homosexuals.

This last preoccupation has become in many ways their major one. Just as feminism and gender-related issues have roiled the American campus as a whole (not to mention the consciousness of the American Jewish community), so they have riveted the attention of Jewish studies. Among the books, dealing largely or wholly with questions of Judaism and gender, and mobilizing dozens of academic authors, that have appeared recently are Regina M. Schwartz's *The Curse of Cain: The Violent Legacy of Monotheism*;[1] Laura Levitt's *Jews and Feminism: The Ambivalent Search For Home*;[2] Daniel Boyarin's *Unheroic Conduct: The Rise of Heterosexuality and the Invention of the Jewish Man*;[3] and the anthologies *Feminist Perspectives on Jewish Studies*,[4] *Judaism Since Gender*,[5] and *Jews and Other Differences: The New Jewish Cultural Studies*.[6]

Although what unites these books is far greater than what divides them, they are not cut from a single cloth. Boyarin's, the best and most radical, is closely argued; Schwartz's, the worst and most widely reviewed, is anything but. And while the essays in *Feminist Perspectives* are largely moderate in tone, those in *Judaism Since Gender* tend to the sharply polemical and those in *Jews and Other Differences* to the contemporaneously offbeat and exotic.

Still, despite the new scholarship's repudiation of grand historical "narratives," all of these books subscribe to a shared purview of their own. A synopsis of it might go as follows.

From its beginnings, Israelite religion was both a liberating and a repressive force, offering an emancipating vision of human brother- and sisterhood based on the ethical paternity of a universal God while also invoking this God's masculine aggressiveness, sexual puritanism, and religious zealotry in order to underwrite the values of a warlike and intolerant culture. Nor was this culture hostile only toward its neighbors. Its own women and sexual deviants, too, were, like the conquered Canaanites, treated as "the Other"—dehumanized and phobicized objects on which a male patriarchy,

[1] Chicago, 228 pp., $22.95.

[2] Routledge, 240 pp., $65.00.

[3] California, 424 pp., $50.00.

[4] Edited by Lynn Davidman and Shelley Tenenbaum. Yale, 304 pp., $35.00.

[5] Edited by Miriam Peskowitz and Laura Levitt. Routledge, 241 pp., $65.00.

[6] Edited by Jonathan Boyarin and Daniel Boyarin. Minnesota, 392 pp., $57.95.

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whose myths and values are recorded in the Bible, projected its unconscious fears, anger, and guilt.

Subsequently, our synopsis continues, when biblical culture was superseded by rabbinic Judaism, the Jewish world again mixed progressive with reactionary features. Jews were now a colonized people themselves, and in many areas, including those of human sexuality and the treatment of women, rabbinic legislation was relatively liberal; yet both it and its attitudes remained male-supremacist. Men alone made the law, studied it, applied it, and participated in the rituals prescribed by it, which continued to be understood as the will of a masculinely-imaged God. Women remained the excluded Other, their existence conveyed to posterity almost entirely through the "mediation" of male writers.

And in modern times as well, our synopsis concludes, though sexual equality has been inscribed on the banner of more than one movement for change in Jewish life, women's exclusion has remained a fact. The best example is the state of Israel. For despite claims of egalitarianism, Zionist settlement in Palestine was sexist from the start, relegating women to the same second-class status they had left behind in the Diaspora. Moreover, not only did the Jewish state continue the "marginalization" of women, it has regressed to the exclusionary nationalism of the Bible, turning the Palestinian into a new Canaanite, and atavistically reviving the male-dominated warrior society of ancient Israel.

Finally, there is a postscript. The notion of an impartial or objective study of the past having been "deconstructed" as a myth, the new Jewish scholar knows that he or she must work from a position of commitment. If historians of previous ages have ignored the silenced voices of the Other, thereby "privileging" the masculinist, misogynist, and homophobic forces of the male world to which they belonged, the new scholar must seek out these voices and be their tongue, not only to do justice to the disempowered dead but to defend the disempowered living.

IT IS not difficult to detect in all this the influence, prominent in all postmodernist thought, of both Freud and Marx. To psychoanalysis the new Jewish scholarship owes the perception that groups of people, like individuals, may react to one another out of unconscious considerations linked more to what others symbolize than to who they are. To Marxism it owes the belief that intellectual and religious superstructures are tools of domination, scripts for organizing society in ways that further class and sectarian interests. For the new scholars, Jewish history is a text to be read between the lines. Nothing in it is what it seems; everything must be "demystified"; everything conceals a hidden agenda for the exercise of power and control.

To which—at least in one case—must be added a third influence: the liberal wing of the American Jewish Sunday school. Of it, Regina Schwartz writes in *The Curse of Cain*:

> What Reform Judaism gave me in my childhood was less the understanding of Judaism as a separated identity than its strong stress on ethics; shedding traditional rituals and the trappings of group identity was accompanied by a renewed emphasis on being "a good person." While I know that distinction will not hold under close examination, it is this antiritualistic strain of Judaism that I inherited, a latter-day version of Jeremiah inveighing against the hypocrisy of worshipers at the temple who were guilty of social abuses.

Jeremiah's, however, was a voice of moderation compared with Schwartz's; for whereas the prophet of Anatot merely blamed ancient Israel for bringing disaster on itself, Schwartz thinks it has brought disaster on the world.

For this she holds responsible the Bible—or rather, *a* Bible, since she believes there are two of them. The first is a Bible of "scarcity," which portrays the world as a cruel place of rigid national, personal, and sexual identities. In this world there is not enough to go around. Life is a zero-sum game with right sides and wrong sides, in-groups and out-groups, elect and rejected; the rules have been dictated by an authoritarian God who assures His followers that, as members of the winning team, they have the right and even the obligation to dispossess the losers. And inherited from this Bible is "the monotheistic commitment to nationalism," which "reduces all other gods to idols and all other worshipers to abominations." It is this commitment that explains today "such seeming conundrums as the violence stemming from Islamic fundamentalism, the wars in South [*sic*] Africa and in Bosnia, and the proliferation of other violent clashes over identity commitments throughout the globe"—including, needless to say, Israeli oppression of the Palestinians.

But opposed to this, Schwartz also believes, there is a second Bible, in whose light we must learn to walk. This is a femininely loving book of fluid boundaries in which there is sufficient boun-

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ty for all and Isaiah's lion can lie down with the lamb: "an alternative Bible that subverts the dominant vision of violence and scarcity with an ideal of plenitude and its corollary ethical imperative of generosity . . . a Bible embracing multiplicity instead of monotheism." True, such a Bible exists more as possibility than as a text, since apart from a few verses or chapters in the Pentateuch and the Prophets (which do not exactly forsake monotheism for "multiplicity," either), there is not much to base it on. But never mind. Let the new scholar write a new Bible—by which, Schwartz explains,

> I do not mean some partial commentary of sanctified unalterable authoritative texts, but a genuine rewriting of traditions: new creation stories, new exoduses, new losses, and new recoveries of what is lost. . . . The old "monotheistic" Bible must be closed so that the new books may be fruitful and multiply. After all, that was the first commandment.

FROM WHOM have we heard all this before? Well, from early Christianity, for one. It did exactly what Schwartz calls for—replacing, as Paul puts it in his Epistle to the Romans, the "law of sin and death" of the Hebrew Bible with the "spirit of life" of the New Testament. And, of course, from Christian writers down through the centuries. And from anti-Christian Enlightenment writers like Gibbon and Voltaire, who accused the Jews of introducing group hatred and bigotry into a tolerant pagan world. For a new Jewish scholar, Schwartz is in some very old company.

One would like to think that, at this late date, there is little need to comment on the absurdity of her charge that mankind's long chronicle of bloody warfare, ethnic and racial prejudice, and religious and ideological intolerance results from attitudes acquired from the Bible. It is as if she had never heard of the sack of Troy, the Indian caste system, the persecution of Buddhism under the T'ang Dynasty, the mass human sacrifices of their enemies practiced by the Aztecs, the savagery of Genghis Khan, Japanese barbarism in World War II, the horrors of the Pol Pot regime, or innumerable other cases of wholesale violence and exclusion practiced in the name of the "identity commitments" of pre- or non-monotheistic peoples.

And perhaps she has not, for, a professor of English at Northwestern University, she does not appear to have read much history—which could also have told her that, far from a biblical invention, "scarcity" has been the perennial fate of most of mankind. Faced with a rocky soil, undependable rainfall, inadequate water for irrigation, warlike neighbors, high royal taxes, and frequent raids by nomadic plunderers, the peasants and herders who were the ancient Israelites did not merely imagine that they lacked the conditions of plenitude.

Schwartz's is, admittedly, an extreme case. Most of the new Jewish scholars are less cavalier about flying in the face of reality. Yet the historical and sociological evidence is not generally approached by them (as it would be by a traditional scholar) as material to be investigated in depth, augmented by further research, and rigorously weighed before appropriate conclusions are drawn from it. With exceptions—such as David Biale's *Eros and the Jews* (1992), a book that applies postmodernist insights in a serious but open-minded manner—the conclusions of the new Jewish scholars all too often come first, with the data trailing selectively behind.

A typical example is Laura Levitt, assistant professor of religion at Temple University, who proposes in *Jews and Feminism* to carry out a "close rhetorical" reading of the *ketubah*, or traditional Jewish marriage contract. Although the wording of this document would impress any casual reader with the considerable obligations it imposes on the husband, who alone of the newlywed couple is made responsible for his partner's financial, emotional, and "conjugal" (i.e., sexual) needs, Levitt feels deep "disappointment" both with the *ketubah*'s "ideological agenda" and with the "legacy . . . of being a Jewish woman." As an example of the *ketubah*'s sexism, she notes its stipulation of the bride's virginity as one of its contractual demands. By giving the husband "sole access to his wife's body," Levitt writes, the *ketubah* "presents an asymmetrical heterosexual relationship as the one and only sanctioned version of marriage. . . . There are clearly two unequal parties involved, a man and his wife."

The trouble with Levitt's "close rhetorical" reading is not only that it is totally ahistorical, treating the *ketubah* as a display of 20th-century *machismo* instead of the remarkably advanced legislation that it was for its time. It is also that, on the subject of the bride's virginity, Levitt, while seeking to buttress her case with passages from the ancient rabbis, simply ignores the most clearly relevant one. This is in the Mishnaic tractate of *Ketubot* (roughly 3rd century C.E.), where we read:

> If a man takes a wife and finds [after the wedding] that she is not a virgin, and she says to him, "I was raped after I was betrothed to

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you," and he says, "No, it happened before I betrothed you and I was deceived"—Rabbi Gamliel and Rabbi Eliezer say: she is to be believed. Rabbi Yehoshua says: we cannot go by what she says . . . until she brings proof.

The key to this scenario is that the rabbis deliberately phrased it to make the bride appear to be lying—for what, really, are the chances of her having been raped, unbeknownst to anyone, in the period between her betrothal and her wedding? In this light, Gamliel and Eliezer's ruling—which, the Talmud makes clear, is the legally binding one, Rabbi Yehoshua's being rejected—is astounding. Even if, they assert, the woman has engaged in premarital sex of her own free will, her marital rights are to be defended by taking her (probably false) word over her husband's. Exactly who, one must ask oneself, is the less equal party in the relationship?

THIS DOES not mean that rabbinic Judaism is sexually egalitarian, or that it is necessarily carping to observe that the *ketubah* does not formally require virginity of the male partner (though, being unverifiable, male virginity is not a useful legal concept). The point is, rather, that once objective evidentiary truth is discarded as a theoretical possibility, let alone as a practical goal, historical writing slides easily into agitprop.

So widespread is this tendency among the new Jewish scholars, and so little troubled do most of them seem by it, that it is exceptional to come across Judith Hauptman, a professor of Talmud at the Jewish Theological Seminary, pleading with her colleagues in *Feminist Perspectives on Jewish Studies*, "Rather than evaluate individual rabbinic texts by contemporary feminist standards, it is essential that each rabbinic work . . . be considered on its own terms and evaluated from the perspective of what its framers set out to accomplish in their own day." Far more prevalent than this voice in the wilderness is that of the historian Beth Wenger, who writes in *Judaism Since Gender*: "If feminist theory has taught us anything, it is that the political dimensions of scholarship are inextricably intertwined with the production of knowledge."

Not that Wenger and others needed feminist theory to teach them this; dialectical materialism could have done it just as well. Indeed, if one substituted "women" for "workers" and "patriarchy" for "ruling class," it is hard to see in what major respects the new feminism and the old socialism differ. Both allegedly speak for an oppressed underclass that has been a historical constant; both attribute all the world's injustices to this oppression, whether because war, racism, violence, and exploitation are unavoidable accompaniments of the concentration of wealth or because they are always associated with male dominance; both strive for the abolition of these ills through a revolution that will do away with all human inequality, replacing the old values of harsh competitiveness and possessiveness with new ones of gentle sharing and communion.

One wonders, then, whether the appearance and spread of feminist theory at a time of Marxism's decline and passing is not a form of intellectual reincarnation. And one wonders, too, what sort of favor feminist theory is ultimately doing women by upholding a belief in, as the Yale historian Paula Hyman approvingly puts it in *Feminist Perspectives on Jewish Studies*, "the universal subordination of women in recorded history." After all, if women have always, everywhere and without exception, been downtrodden by men, it would seem a matter of simple inductive reasoning to conclude, as some men indeed do, that it is the female's nature to be trodden on and the male's to do the treading.

IT IS precisely here that feminist theory, which insists on the culturally-conditioned "constructedness" of all human identities, finds itself in serious trouble; for if sexual identity too is freely "constructed" independently of biological constraints, how explain the odd fact that all known cultures just happen to have constructed it inimically (as feminists would have it) to women? And the new Jewish scholarship only underlines this question still further when it rejects "apologetic" Jewish claims (made by *Wissenschaft* scholars, among others) that the historical position of Jewish women was often markedly better than that of non-Jewish ones.

That gender roles often *do* seem to have been construed differently by Jews is widely accepted. Especially in times and places where rabbinic authority was strong, Jewish ideals of masculinity, at least as transmitted to us by written sources, appear to have departed significantly from Gentile ones, placing a high value on traits like studiousness, forbearance, and reactive patterns of passive endurance, and placing a low or negative value on physical prowess and courage, self-assertiveness, and sexual libido. Similarly, Jewish ideals of womanhood sometimes also diverged from Gentile norms, "valorizing" worldly practicality and economic initiative more than sexual attractiveness, docility, or a trusting reliance on men.

One could imagine these differences being cele-

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brated by the new Jewish scholarship: here at last, it would seem, is historical proof both of the mutability of sexual roles and of their positive transformation in a feminist direction. And yet, as with Laura Levitt's reading of the *ketubah*, this is not the light in which they have generally been regarded. The dominant judgment is expressed by Naomi Seidman—who, in discussing the "feminization of Jewish men" in 19th-century Eastern Europe, writes in *Judaism Since Gender* that this phenomenon was nevertheless "thoroughly dependent on a patriarchal system whose hierarchies and misogyny it encode[d] and even enforce[d]."

One can see Seidman's logic: since the male world of study and ritual was held, even by women, in higher esteem than female pursuits, and was more generative of social power, female exclusion from it could be considered "misogynist." Moreover, the "economic woman" of the *shtetl* rarely engaged in much more than the home production of simple goods, peddling, or shopkeeping. Though less arduous, her life was hardly more independent than that of a Russian peasant woman who might also be expected to do "men's work" in the fields.

But was her husband better off? As is the case with many feminists, who, overlooking the power often wielded by women in the home, refuse to grant the slightest dignity or satisfaction to traditional female lives while wildly glamorizing the lives of working men, the new Jewish scholars tend to ignore what life was like even for those males who successfully made it into the rabbinical world of study and authority.

Their deprivation began when they were boys, robbed of their childhood by having to spend daylight hours in a dreary *heder*, absorbing rote knowledge from an often frustrated and irascible teacher. It continued when they were adolescents, sent far from home to study in distant yeshivas, frequently penniless and compelled to cadge meals from reluctant families while closeted day-in and day-out with the same endless volumes of the Talmud. And it did not necessarily end in adulthood, when most worked as small-town rabbis who earned a living by inspecting the innards of chickens and giving lessons to the children of the rich on whom their meager salaries depended. Lucky was the girl, one might say, who was spared all this.

Few Jewish men in the *shtetl*, moreover, became rabbis or religious functionaries. Most worked as tailors, shoemakers, petty artisans, petty tradesmen, wagon drivers, peddlers, tavern keepers, porters, small entrepreneurs. They labored hard, long, and more often than not in poverty, and if they had the comforts of public rituals that were often off-limits to women, these included such misogynist pleasures as rising in the middle of the night for penitential prayers during the entire month of Elul or giving up the only morning of the week they could rest their tired bodies in order to trudge to synagogue on icy winter Sabbaths.

The paradoxical thing about the new Jewish scholars is that, although they presume to speak for the disempowered, their writing of history is elitist to the core. From their theorizing heights, they look down on the past through a thick fog of abstraction that hides the common Jew. They honestly seem to have no idea of what it is like to rise in a freezing house, to put food on the table for hungry children when there is not enough of it, to work all day with a needle or an awl, to struggle, suffer, fall ill, die, see others die—and to do all this in the company of a wife or a husband with whom, even if there was no love felt (though often, literary sources tell us, there was), one had to pull together in order to survive. Under a mantle of sympathy for the everyday experience that "conventional" history ignores, the new scholars exhibit no little contempt for it.

THIS ELITISM has another consequence. When speaking of their own society, Jews in Eastern Europe used to divide it into a majority of *proste yidn* or "plain Jews" and a minority of *sheyne yidn* or "fine Jews"—that is, into the ordinary people and the better-educated and more refined. Although most of the new scholars have little feel for, or empathy with, the actual texture of the lives of either group, they are in the position of siding theoretically with the "plain Jews" while actually and almost instinctively identifying with the "fine." This is why someone like Daniel Boyarin can, in his *Unheroic Conduct*, treat the figure of the "feminized Jewish man," sociologically far more *sheyn* than *prost*, and by no means the representative East European Jewish male, as a universal type, and then proceed to offer him up as a role model.

And yet Boyarin is the most interesting of the new scholars. In his thinking, he executes the intellectual equivalent of a balletic split, which ends with one leg pointing toward religious Orthodoxy (of which he is an avowed practitioner) and the other toward a militant identification with radical feminism and "gay, lesbian, and bisexual Jews (and the Queer Nation as a whole)." Outflanking the majority of his colleagues in both directions, he is both allied with them and *sui generis*.

His project in *Unheroic Conduct* is fourfold. In the

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first place, it is to establish, through a close reading of rabbinic texts, that the "feminized Jewish male" (and to a lesser extent, the "masculinized Jewish woman") has been not just a late East European development but a normative model for Jewish men throughout the entire post-biblical period.

Secondly, Boyarin argues that, although this product of a culture "within which 'real men' were sissies" marked a great step forward in male sexual attitudes, it did not go far enough. Since it stopped short of actually admitting women into the male "locker room" of the synagogue and the study house, it remained, just as scholars like Naomi Seidman charge, male-chauvinist.

Thirdly, according to Boyarin, much of 19th- and 20th-century Jewish social history can be understood as a reaction to these anomalous Jewish "engenderments." Such disparate phenomena as the rise of the bourgeois Jewish family in Central and Western Europe and the spread of Zionism were attempts at cultural assimilation, whose central thrust was to remasculinize the "Jewish male femme" (and refeminize the Jewish woman) by recreating him in the image of European manhood. Here Boyarin particularly singles out Zionism for disapprobation; through its idealization of the "muscle Jew," it represented a flight from the effeminate stereotype that a "homophobic" European culture had affixed on Jewish men emerging from the ghetto.

Lastly, while conceding that Orthodox Judaism has itself remained homophobic and misogynistic—like most feminists, he thinks these two attitudes go together of necessity—Boyarin still believes that, thanks to its long history of unconventional thinking about gender, Orthodoxy offers promising ground for revolutionary feminist reform. He sums up:

> Two forms of critical work need to be engaged at the same time. One is directed at a critique of traditional Jewish culture and gender practice, while the other mobilizes aspects of that practice in order to demystify dominant ideologies of gender within the large cultural and social context. One argues for the potential and necessity for radical change within traditional Judaism, while the other argues that traditional [Jewish] culture has something to offer in the effort to produce radical change within the culture of "the West."

BESIDES BEING well-read and intellectually agile, Boyarin can be an amusing *provocateur.* Since he is so much cleverer than the other new Jewish scholars, it is almost possible, despite the kinkiness of his views and his extreme hostility toward Israel, to read him with something approaching pleasure. More often, though, one reads him with something like dread.

The danger is not that these views will conquer Orthodoxy, which is the last bastion that will fall to them. It is rather that, much as one might like to regard the new scholarship as a passing phase in Jewish intellectual life, its proponents are already too strongly entrenched for this. Given that most of them are young, with long careers still ahead of them in which they will produce many students as their heirs, American Jews will be living with their thinking for decades to come.

For a non-Orthodox American Jewish community that even now is suffering from a loss of boundaries and a deep confusion about its identity; a decline of the family as its core unit; a low birth rate and a high rate of exogamous marriage; falling participation of men as compared with women; a growing distancing from Israel and Jews in other countries and a consequently weakened sense of ethnic solidarity and Jewish peoplehood; and a general uncertainty as to how Jews differ from non-Jews or should want to, this is not good news. Rather than providing such a community with the intellectual leadership it needs, the new scholars will only increase its anomie.

No one can predict the outcome of the sexual revolution that America is now in the throes of, and that dwarfs any of its predecessors in its concentrated assault on fundamentals of male and female behavior that have been taken for granted by nearly all human beings until now. No one can say whether men or women are built to withstand this assault, or what the results may be if they are not. And no one knows what a world lacking firm notions of masculinity and femininity, or of the distinctions between them, would be like. But it is chilling for custodians of the history of a people who taught mankind that it was created, male and female, in God's image to join the serpent of delusory omnipotence in whispering in our ear that we can become like gods, and that we can with impunity remake our pasts and ourselves, sexually and in every other way, as we please.

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"Amistad" and the Abuse of History

Gary Rosen

"IT'LL MAKE a helluva story," Steven Spielberg reportedly said upon first learning of Thomas Keneally's novel, *Schindler's List*. And then, warily: "Is it true?"

The story of *Amistad*, Spielberg's latest foray into what he calls "socially conscious" film-making, shares the improbable qualities of its predecessor. Not only is it, like *Schindler's List*, ready-made for Hollywood—savage injustice with a happy ending—but once again history itself has furnished the necessary license. Just as Oskar Schindler, Nazi industrialist turned humanitarian, really did exist, and really did save a number of Jews from the Holocaust, so, too, 53 captured West Africans really did stage a bloody mutiny aboard a Cuban slave schooner in the summer of 1839; did try to sail home, only to wind up, through the trickery of the surviving Spanish crew, in the waters off Long Island, where they were promptly seized by an American naval ship; and finally, after eighteen months of imprisonment in Connecticut and a protracted legal battle, were indeed declared free, thanks in part to the last-minute intervention of no less a personage than former President John Quincy Adams, who successfully argued on their behalf before a U.S. Supreme Court then dominated by Southerners.

Given such promising material to start with, it is no surprise that Steven Spielberg's big-screen rendering of these events is a "helluva story." But is *it* true?

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THE NARRATIVE center of Spielberg's *Amistad* is the remarkable person of Joseph Cinqué, the leader of the uprising. Played by the imposing Djimon Hounsou, a native of Benin, Cinqué is introduced in the film's harrowing opening scene as we watch him linger in quivering, vindictive fury over the prostrate body of the captain of the *Amistad*, whom he has just killed. This image of primitive rage fades quickly, however. As the plot unfolds, Cinqué emerges in a far different light: a figure of unshakable pride and dignity; a man of keen sensitivity, heartsick for home and modest to a fault about his own exploits; and a shrewd observer of his new surroundings, increasingly involved in the legal defense of the *Amistad* prisoners. Throughout, he bears himself with the brooding self-assurance of a captive African prince.

Of course, Cinqué and his luckless companions are not left to fight alone. Their cause is championed by two American abolitionists: the black Theodore Joadson (Morgan Freeman), a wealthy ex-slave, and the white Lewis Tappan (Stellan Skarsgård), a devout merchant whose sympathy for the Africans is tainted by a fixation on their value as potential martyrs. In due course, Joadson and Tappan hire an unkempt young lawyer-on-the-make named Roger Baldwin (Matthew McConaughey), whose exclusive interest in the case, until he develops an ac-

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quaintance with Cinqué, is collecting his fee; the disconsolate Africans dub him "dung scraper."

Arrayed against the *Amistad* Africans and their supporters is the administration of President Martin Van Buren (Nigel Hawthorne), who finds himself drawn into a most unwelcome diplomatic and political firestorm. Invoking its treaty rights, the Spanish crown insists on the return of its citizens' property. More troubling still for Van Buren as the election of 1840 approaches, the Southern states are determined to see violent resistance to slavery punished; they want the mutineers shipped back to Cuba, where they face certain execution.

The courtroom defense of Cinqué and the others provides the skeleton of the movie's plot, fleshed out by recollections of the Africans' treatment on the slave ship that brought them to Cuba. Cinqué relates in court—and we see in a nightmarish flashback—the unspeakable horror of this transatlantic "middle passage": the packing of naked, chained men and women into a narrow hold; the merciless whipping of insubordinates; the starvation and execution-by-drowning of the weak and the sick. As the legal and moral tide turns in the Africans' favor, the Van Buren administration forces aside the original judge and jury, replacing them with a presumably controllable lone jurist named Coglin (Jeremy Northam); but, defying all expectations, this judge too comes out dramatically for the Africans, compelling an inevitable appeal to the Supreme Court.

Enter, at last, John Quincy Adams (Anthony Hopkins). Though the abolitionists Joadson and Tappan had repeatedly sought the aid of the irascible seventy-four-year-old ex-President—a renowned opponent of slavery, although not himself an abolitionist—Adams agrees to join Baldwin only at this final stage. But the two lawyers are not on their own. From his cell, Cinqué peppers them with questions and advice about their strategy, prompting Adams at last to bring the leader of the Africans to his family home in Massachusetts. Unshackled at Adams's command, Cinqué strolls with the former President through his greenhouse—admiring, pointedly, an African violet—and then confers with the wizened "chief," assuring him through a translator:

> We have my ancestors at our side. I will call into the past, far back to the beginning of time, and beg them to come help me at the judgment. I will reach back and draw them into me.

Once before the Supreme Court, Adams leaves behind the legal technicalities that had dominated the earlier proceedings. Laying hold of the Southern claim that "slavery has existed as far back as one chooses to look" and is thus "neither sinful nor immoral," he wonders with wistful indignation how his country could have strayed so far from the principles of the Declaration of Independence and from the example of its own ancestors, the founding fathers. Echoing Cinqué, he emphatically concludes that "who we are"—by which he means, who we *must* be—"is who we were."

The Court's nearly unanimous decision, read by the great jurist Joseph Story (portrayed here, in a cameo appearance, by retired Supreme Court Justice Harry A. Blackmun), is a final vindication for the Africans. A grateful Cinqué, speaking through a translator, queries Adams: "What did you say? What words did you use to persuade them?" To which the gruff Adams replies, after a moment's thought: "Yours."

A deft piece of movie-making, *Amistad* is gorgeous to look at and persuasive in its evocation of period ambience. As the critic Stanley Kauffmann put it in the *New Republic*, the film is built "on texture," from the frantic, bloodied fingers of Cinqué as he struggles to undo his chains to the liver spots on the bald pate of John Quincy Adams. The captive Africans wear perfectly tattered blankets; the prepubescent Spanish queen, perfectly arrayed taffeta. The film's settings, from the grand sailing ships to the courtroom, often convey the feeling of elaborate *tableaux vivants*, contrived but on the whole effective.

Impressive, too, and by now much ballyhooed, are the lengths to which Spielberg has gone to ensure that the Africans are portrayed authentically. The black members of the cast, most of whom, like Djimon Hounsou, come from West Africa, were coached in Mende, the language of the *Amistad* captives, and speak it exclusively (but for a half-dozen words) with English subtitles. Even their manacles and chains, Spielberg has boasted, are real.

Atmospherics aside, the film is admittedly more of a mixed bag. The dialogue and score (by John Williams) descend to melodrama with painful regularity. And the featured American actors—Freeman and McConaughey—are plainly uncomfortable in their 19th-century skins. As performers they are put to shame by their English counterparts—Hawthorne, Hopkins, and Pete Postlethwaite (as the government's attorney)—who at least have some notion of how to impersonate the body language and bearing of a more formal age. Houn-

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sou, too, carries his part off with subtlety, using his expressive face and the unfamiliar cadences of Mende to great effect.

But it is nothing new to say that Spielberg is a master of visual storytelling or even that he is frequently a banal dramatist. *Amistad* asks to be judged on grounds other than these. Spielberg has insisted that it captures a "shared piece of American history," and history, even at the movies, is not the same thing as verisimilitude, however artfully manufactured.

The facts at issue in Spielberg's *Amistad* are not picayune details, quibbles over the compressing or simplifying of what is a very complex tale. Such things are to be expected in a dramatization. What Spielberg has done in relating this "shared piece of American history" is more fundamental. He has misrepresented, in a way that can only be intentional, the racial relations that form the very heart of the events he depicts.

CONSIDER, TO begin with, Lewis Tappan and Roger Baldwin, two of the movie's central white characters. By the end of *Amistad*, when the case goes to the Supreme Court, Tappan has completely disappeared from the plot, banished (apparently) for the sin of having welcomed the martyrdom of the Africans—a view, the black abolitionist Joadson charges, that reveals Tappan's deep-seated hatred of them. In historical fact, Lewis Tappan was the prime defender of the Africans from start to finish. Far from being indifferent to their fate as individuals, he refused to prolong their suffering by pressing for more litigation. Far from being a closet racist, this co-founder (with William Lloyd Garrison) of the American Antislavery Society was extraordinary in his day for publicly condoning marriage between blacks and whites.

As for Roger Baldwin, whom Tappan helped hire to represent the *Amistad* Africans, he was hardly the scruffy, money-grubbing young attorney portrayed by McConaughey. In his late forties at the time, and a man of considerable public standing—he would be elected governor of Connecticut three years later and U.S. Senator after that—Baldwin was already well known for his abolitionist sympathies. For the hundreds of hours he spent defending the *Amistad* Africans, he was paid a token fee; it was basically *pro-bono* work.

Spielberg's revisionism with respect to Tappan and Baldwin serves a wider purpose: namely, the denigration of Christianity, especially of the white, Protestant variety. The essential connection between the two men, which the movie elides, was an organization called the *Amistad* Committee. Tappan was the engine behind this group of prominent and militantly evangelical abolitionists; it is *they* who raised money for the case, publicized it, and carried it through to its successful conclusion. But the *Amistad* Committee makes no appearance in *Amistad*, and the wider abolitionist movement, when it is visible at all, appears only on the periphery. It appears, moreover, as a pitiful object of derision, in the form of earnest, dour matrons and pasty-faced men, vacantly singing hymns and waving crosses at the *Amistad* captives (who call them "miserable-looking").

Amistad does leave us with one admirable Christian, the courageous Judge Coglin, who is a Catholic. He, however, is a complete fabrication, as is the episode of the Van Buren administration's outlandish interference in the judicial process that he thwarts. Although there was much to blame in the President's handling of the case—he was prepared to whisk the Africans back to Cuba, without chance of appeal, in the event of a favorable ruling—his administration never stooped to the villainy attributed to it in *Amistad*.

IF THE white characters in *Amistad* are made to take their historical lumps, the black ones are allowed to create a history of their own. Debbie Allen, a co-producer of the film and the only African-American among its makers, "assumed the role," according to *Newsweek*, "of guardian of black culture." Having sold Spielberg on the project in the first place, she kept the story from "becoming too much about the white people who fought for [the Africans'] freedom in court."

What this meant in practice is best seen in the film's treatment of the black abolitionist Theodore Joadson. Reviewers have noted two things about this character. First, that he is entirely fictional (a central circumstance in the much-publicized lawsuit for plagiarism against Spielberg's company, DreamWorks SKG, by the novelist Barbara Chase-Riboud). Second, that he is an empty vessel, leaving Morgan Freeman "seriously underused" (Janet Maslin in the *New York Times*) in an "underwritten role" (David Ansen in *Newsweek*).

Having established these two salient points, however, no critic has asked why Spielberg went to the bother of having Theodore Joadson at all. The answer is obvious: he is necessary to maintain a racial quota. *Amistad* never departs from a strict one-to-one ratio between black and white lead characters. The fictional Joadson has to be paired with Cinqué in order to balance Baldwin and Tap-

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pan (whose exit from the movie neatly coincides with the arrival of John Quincy Adams). To such grotesque lengths is this balancing act taken that at no point in *Amistad*—in stark defiance of historical reality—do we see the white protagonists alone plotting the defense of the captives.

But the character of Joadson performs a more subtle task as well. A thoroughly assimilated American—educated, proper, given to patriotic speechifying—he serves as a deferential, desiccated foil to the soulful and defiant Africans. For the real purpose of the makers of *Amistad* is a radical redressing of the historical balance. As Debbie Allen told the *Los Angeles Times*:

> Whether you're talking about art, or literature, or music, the real history has just been castrated—left out—and great historians have done it. It's . . . one culture wanting to be dominant, and not really acknowledging the contributions of a culture that was far beyond and centuries ahead.

For Spielberg, this particular species of reverse racism is by no means a new note: the superiority of African to Western culture is a theme of his 1985 movie *The Color Purple* (from the novel by Alice Walker), in which Africa serves as a redemptive counterexample to benighted America. In *Amistad*, what most stands out about the Africans is, indeed, the bold and unyielding nature of their *Africanness*, a point driven home not just by their "Mende-only" dialogue but also by their insistence on African burial rites, their exuberant chants and dances, and, most dramatically, by Cinqué's arresting invocation of his ancestors.

The film's starry-eyed, grandiose view of African culture is deeply problematic in itself. But it also grossly falsifies the real experience of the *Amistad* captives. Joseph Cinqué was, by every account, a man of uncommon dignity and presence. As the poet William Cullen Bryant memorialized him: "All stern of look and strong of limb,/His dark eyes on the ground—/And silently they gazed on him/As on a *lion* bound." But he was also, it should be emphasized, a twenty-five-year-old rice farmer from the African interior, brutally torn from a life of primitive simplicity and transformed, in a matter of months, into a *cause célèbre*.

The instrument of this transformation was the abolitionist movement, which was certainly not the wan and slightly foolish phenomenon depicted by Spielberg. It was, rather, an immensely sophisticated and self-assured social movement, one that took its mission—its *civilizing* mission—quite seriously. This meant that Cinqué and the others were hardly accommodated in their native practices. Rather, they were instructed right from the start in Christianity and English—by Yale divinity students, no less.

And the lessons took. Thus, in a typical letter from the Africans to their defenders, Cinqué complained to Baldwin of their treatment at the hands of Colonel Stanton Pendleton, the jailer, calling him a "bad man" who "did not think of God" and whose soul would be "lost . . . to hell." When informed of the Supreme Court's decision, the Africans replied, "We very glad—love God—love Jesus Christ—He over all—we thank Him." Then they knelt in prayer.

In *Amistad*, things are very different. Christianity is not a positive force in the lives of the captives; to the contrary, when it is not merely a distraction, it is a force for moral weakness. Thus, when one of the Africans, Cinqué's only real rival among the captives, becomes so impressed by the story of Jesus that he embraces the Christian faith, the effect is to render a once-fierce warrior tame, an object of Cinqué's well-deserved pity and disdain. One need not be a defender of the evangelizing practices of the abolitionists to note the violence done by Spielberg's treatment, not only to them but to those whose lives they undertook to transform by their ministrations.

As wards in both a legal and an educational sense, the real-life Africans in the *Amistad* affair had nothing to offer toward shaping their own defense except their first-person testimony. John Quincy Adams did meet Cinqué, as the movie maintains. But it is inconceivable that he would have done so at his own home, treating Cinqué as an equal ("I'm being very honest with you; anything else would be disrespectful"), calling himself a "chief" and American citizens "villagers" in an exercise of moral equivalence, and modestly accepting instruction in African spirituality. The actual meeting took place in Westville, Connecticut, where the Africans were being held, pending appeal.

The scene has been well imagined in William Owens's *Black Mutiny*,* a carefully researched historical novel about the *Amistad* affair specifically cited by the moviemakers as "a major source of reference material":

* Originally published in 1953, it is available in a new paperback, Plume, 322 pp., $12.95. The best scholarly treatment of the affair, which I have relied on throughout, is *Mutiny on the Amistad* by Howard Jones (1987), recently reissued in paperback by Oxford University Press, 271 pp., $12.95.

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"Cinqué! Grabo!" Baldwin called.

The two men left their woodchopping and came to the room. They shook hands with Adams and greeted him in forced English. It was a meeting of primitive man and the finest product of civilization.

"These are the two chief conspirators," Wilcox [the U.S. marshal] said.

It was apparent they had not understood his words. They bowed to him, smiling as if he had paid them the highest compliment. . . .

"We read," Cinqué said, his manner dignified, his face proud with achievement.

Colonel Pendleton brought a Bible and asked Cinqué and Grabo to read. Laboriously they spelled through a few verses of the New Testament. These men, Adams thought, accused of piracy and murder, were like children with a hornbook.

Far from meeting as equals, Adams and Cinqué encountered each other across a profound social divide. If *Amistad* pretends otherwise, it is only because Cinqué, by the movie's lights, has to be seen to be freeing himself in court just as he did on board the slave schooner. Strangely enough, the same need also drives *Amistad*'s hagiography of Adams, who—alone among the white characters—has his role ennobled. Framed throughout by patriotic symbols, Adams embodies a pristine America just as Cinqué embodies a pristine Africa, and the two must collaborate in the end.

But—or perhaps for that very reason—Adams's resulting speech to the Supreme Court is an incoherent jumble. Leave aside the fact that it fails to do justice to the full obsessive eccentricity of Adams's actual *eight-hour* performance, which focused on the Van Buren administration's kowtowing to the Spanish crown and the South. (In private, Justice Story called the speech an "extraordinary argument . . . extraordinary . . . for its power, for its bitter sarcasm, and its dealing with topics far beyond the record and points of discussion.") Even on its own terms, Adams's speech in *Amistad* fails.

The problem lies not with his appeal to "the very nature of man" or to the ideas of the Declaration of Independence. That is all well and good, and faithful to the record. The problem lies in the opposite direction: with the deliberate overlay of African-style ancestor worship.

"Who we are is who we were," Adams intones in Cinqué-influenced words as his gaze alights on marble busts of Washington, Jefferson, Madison, and the rest. But in thus shifting from the transcendent principles held by these men to their status as ancestral persons, the Adams of Spielberg's imagining comes weirdly close to embracing the view that he has condemned just moments before. Is it necessary to point out that "who we were," in the case of many of the American founding fathers, was slaveholders—or that in Southern opinion, slavery was acceptable precisely because it could be traced (to use Cinqué's pious words) "far back to the beginning of time"?

No, John Quincy Adams was not open to the ways of the Africans, any more than were the abolitionists of his day. All of them were close-minded in a most profound way, quite certain in their devotion to Christian truth and natural rights. That, indeed, is why they came to the aid of the *Amistad* captives in the first place.

AMONG THE *bien-pensants*, only the columnist Frank Rich of the *New York Times* has registered a serious complaint about *Amistad*. The movie, he wrote, is a "diversion" from the difficult racial issues of our day, "brought to us by [President Clinton's] campaign contributors at DreamWorks": "The whole country can, after all, agree that slavery is bad—and still come to blows over affirmative action."

Rich is right about the political affiliations of *Amistad*'s makers, but wrong to consider the movie a "diversion" or a "form of escapism." To the contrary, *Amistad* is a major artistic offensive in the current debate over race. It is, in fact, an extraordinary example of racial preference, giving blacks a prominence and importance they did not have while distorting or denying the role of whites. And, being "only" a movie, it is conveniently far removed from the remedial reach of a referendum-wielding electorate or the various courts that have recently struck down similar policies of "affirmative action."

To the judges installed in this particular corner of the public square, the question of whether Spielberg has been true to the historical record is of no interest. It is enough for them that *Amistad* evokes the distant horrors endured by enslaved Africans during the "middle passage." "[T]hese spare scenes are among the most wrenching ever put on film," gushed Jonathan Alter in a *Newsweek* cover story. For Janet Maslin of the *New York Times*, "the stark, agonizing depiction of the captives' Atlantic crossing" was enough to establish the "irrefutable" worthiness of *Amistad*. David Denby, who devoted a third of his review in *New York* magazine to this same short segment, called it the "best thing in the movie," staged by Spielberg "with a power that perhaps he alone in film history is capable of." On

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this view, the only truth with which *Amistad* need bother is the visceral one.

The popular critics can perhaps be forgiven for taking the movie's claims of accuracy at face value. After all, *Amistad* can point to an impressive list of academic consultants, including the historian John Hope Franklin, head of the President's race-advisory board, and Henry Louis Gates, Jr., chairman of the Afro-American studies department at Harvard. (Given the movie's casual regard for facts, one does wonder what these eminences could possibly have been consulted about: the costumes?) But more informed observers who have weighed in on the movie have been every bit as credulous as the daily and weekly critics. George F. Will—alas—anointed *Amistad* "a nuanced, truthful film about America's racial history." Writing in the *New Republic*, the historian Sean Wilentz of Princeton noted some of *Amistad*'s more obvious historical "lapses and manipulations" but nevertheless gave the movie his benediction, proclaiming that Spielberg had "succeeded in capturing the political and cultural nuances," and that the various characters in the movie "challenge the racial stereotypes that distort contemporary American discussions of race, not least in Hollywood."

In point of fact, *Amistad* does not challenge the racial stereotypes that distort contemporary American discussions of race. Mirroring our mendacious system of counting by race, of which it is a faithful expression, it confirms and extends those stereotypes. What is more, it will go on doing so for years to come. As has been widely reported, DreamWorks has already sent thousands of high-school and college educators a free "learning kit" to help them "integrate the lessons of this landmark film" into their history classes. Free educational screenings are sure to follow, as they did with *Schindler's List*. For the foreseeable future, *Amistad* is destined to be shown to our children as the featured movie of Black History Month. By this means and others, Steven Spielberg's film will long contribute to making it harder and harder for us to tell the truth, either about our history or about ourselves.

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Dollar Diplomacy Returns

Lawrence F. Kaplan

It has long been a truism of international politics that the best guarantor of peace is democracy; whatever quarrels they may have with one another, democratic nations do not resort to war to resolve them. But this fundamental understanding has lately been undergoing a profound revision. According to the new wisdom, it is not the political organization of a society but rather its economic orientation that counts, and specifically the degree of its integration into the emerging global economy. The revised version has been neatly summarized by one of its major boosters, the *New York Times* columnist Thomas L. Friedman: "No two countries that both have a McDonald's have fought a war against each other."

The new commercialist understanding, far from remaining only the property of pundits, has in fact been enshrined in official policy. In its name, the Clinton administration has undertaken a major shift in the priorities of American diplomacy. "The days when we could afford to subordinate our economic interests to foreign-policy or defense concerns are long past," declared former U.S. trade representative Mickey Kantor. What the United States must do, in the words of former Under Secretary of Commerce Jeffrey Garten, is "use all its foreign-policy levers to achieve commercial goals." And the President himself has pledged to place "our economic competitiveness at the heart of our foreign policy."

It has been decades since this line of thinking—that the chief business of America in the world should be not politics but business—has been taken seriously. Throughout the cold war (leftist critics to the contrary notwithstanding) commercial interests played a much smaller role in American foreign policy than did the imperatives of strategy and ideology. This was true from the late 1940's, when President Truman angered American industrialists by instituting export controls against the Soviet bloc, all the way through to the time of President Reagan, who wielded economic sanctions against the Soviet Union, Poland, and Libya over the protestations of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.

The Clinton White House characterizes its own approach to foreign affairs as "pragmatic neo-Wilsonianism," but Woodrow Wilson, as it happens, entered office with the explicit intention of putting an end to the "dollar diplomacy" of the Taft administration. In international affairs, the true inclinations of the Clintonites bear a much closer resemblance to the policies of Harding, Coolidge, and Hoover—and, like theirs, the new policy comes clothed in high-minded rhetoric. According to the President, focusing on trade not only makes good economic sense but actually helps the United States to realize the traditional objectives of its foreign policy. Specifically, the new dollar diplomacy is said to accomplish three things:

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enhance international security and lessen the likelihood of conflict; promote democracy; and ensure American primacy on the global scene.

As to the first of these, a White House spokesman has said that commerce, by "knit[ting] together the countries whose livelihoods depend upon each other," ends by "creating a direct stake in peace and stability." It was in line with this belief, indeed, that the entire foreign-policy establishment was overhauled during the first Clinton term. The Commerce Department, from a newly established "war room," was charged with spearheading trade missions across the globe; the Defense Department installed trade desks at the Pentagon; the intelligence community shifted resources to accommodate administration demands for commercial intelligence; and within the White House, a National Economic Council was created as a counterweight to the National Security Council, itself increasingly focused on economic matters.

Unfortunately, the logic of the administration's new approach was soon revealed to have things exactly backward. Thus, during the first Clinton term, the White House held America's military relationship with a key ally—Japan—hostage to a dispute over car parts, even as it encouraged trade and investment agreements with real or potential adversaries like Syria, North Korea, and China. In neither case did American diplomacy conduce to stability or cooperation. When tensions escalated on the Korean peninsula early in 1994, irked Japanese officials suggested that in the event of a conflict there, the United States should not look to Japan for support. As for ongoing American efforts to influence the behavior of our adversaries, trade, if anything, has proved less of a help than a burden, creating an interest in maintaining the status quo and inhibiting our ability to use power for political ends.

For a clear example of how an aggressive economism can corrupt the broader ends of American foreign policy, one need look no farther than our regime of export controls. Early in his first term, the President declared a "national emergency" to deal with the threat of weapons proliferation. But even as he spoke, his administration was striving to dismantle COCOM, the multilateral organization that had monitored high-tech exports during the cold war. At the urging of industry, the President then abolished most restrictions on the sale of computer, telecommunications, satellite, and even nuclear technology.

Within a year of the 1995 decision to deregulate the export of supercomputers—sophisticated devices whose uses include the design of advanced weapons systems and the simulation of atomic explosions—Russia's ministry of atomic energy had acquired four of them for the country's premier nuclear-weapons laboratory. Soon it was reported that one of the 47 supercomputers sold to China over the previous eighteen months had surfaced at a military-research institute. At the very moment Congress was responding to these sales by voting to reinstate controls, the President lifted the ban on selling American nuclear reactors to China; it was, he explained, a confidence-building measure. But how much the Chinese need their confidence bolstered by American dual-use technology may be gleaned from a 1997 CIA report, according to which they are now the world's "most significant supplier of weapons of mass destruction and related goods and technology."

Is it really necessary to point out that, even in an era of globalization, commercial ties are properly an effect, not a cause, of political stability? In the serene conviction that things are the other way around, the White House has been recklessly testing a proposition that has been found wanting over and over again in this century: the theory that trade and war are incompatible. The European flirtation with this idea in the period prior to World War I ended decisively at the Marne. In its American version, the idea enjoyed a vogue in the 1920's before being put to rest by the ensuing decades of Depression, war, and East-West conflict. It is alarming to see it being touted again, as if nothing has been learned, and nothing remembered.

THE SECOND tenet of the Clinton White House is that open markets promote democracy and political freedom. In the words of National Security Adviser Samuel Berger, "the fellow travelers of the new global economy—computers and modems, faxes and photocopiers, increased contacts and binding contracts—carry with them the seeds of [political] change."

The link between free markets and political liberalization—another staple of an earlier period—may or may not prove valid in the long run. But there have been, and remain, numerous capitalist states with authoritarian political systems. For every Britain there existed a Wilhelmine Germany; for every Taiwan or South Korea, a Malaysia and an Indonesia. As no less an apostle of economism than Milton Friedman has acknowledged, "It is clearly possible to have economic arrangements that are fundamentally capitalist and political arrangements that are not free."

In this area, too, the United States has become caught in a bind of its own devising. For one thing, the notion that we can achieve democratization by

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chasing free markets has inevitably led us to turn a blind eye to flagrant abuses of human rights in countries where we happen to want to do business. Our relations with the Republic of Sudan are an example. Sudan's links to terrorism, and the war it has been conducting against its own Christian population, have earned it a place on the State Department list of rogue states with which American companies are, theoretically, prohibited from doing business. Last year, however, when a U.S. petroleum corporation complained to the White House that a lucrative deal with the Sudanese government was being held up by the 1996 Anti-Terrorism Act, the President's response was to exempt Sudan from the act's provisions. Business first; democracy later.

Then, too, the subordination of political principle to the expansion of economic ties leads to the justified impression of American hypocrisy. In the name of our ostensible commitment to political liberty, we have maintained sanctions against some relatively weak states of marginal commercial significance like Burma and Cuba; in the meantime, we have actively promoted trade with nations like China that boast no less abysmal human-rights records but large markets. As the French newspaper *Le Monde* noted in an editorial, "The Chinese case destroys the American pretension to universality on human rights."

The point is well taken. When it is driven by commercial imperatives, the international conduct of the United States becomes indistinguishable from that of a frankly cynical country like France. By definition, the primary aim of commercial diplomacy is not liberty but prosperity—a fine and important thing, but hardly a cause for which Americans should ever be asked to fight and die.

FINALLY, THE Clinton administration offers an argument from self-interest: as the era of geopolitics has given way to the era of geo-economics, we are told, commercial diplomacy has become the means for achieving and maintaining American global primacy. In the view of Mickey Kantor, support for free trade "is about assuring the world that the United States will continue to be the world leader in this new era of interdependence."

The "realist" case for commercial diplomacy, however, is the weakest justification of all. Although the President has spoken confidently of our ability to "harness the global economy to the benefit of all of our people," it is no easy task for any government to "harness" an interdependent world. To be sure, the White House has occasionally flirted with openly mercantilist policies—organizing trade missions for American corporations, engaging in commercial brinkmanship with trading partners. Yet while government sponsorship has helped to secure international contracts for a select number of industries, these contracts make up only a tiny fraction of overseas American investment. In turn, the percentage of international transactions that is accounted for by trade and direct investment has been rapidly diminishing.

The real medium of globalization is finance. The monetary mass circumnavigating the globe, and turning over at a daily rate of $1.2 trillion, represents fifteen times the value of international trade. In this vital sector, neither the U.S. nor any other nation can act as a "world leader." To the contrary, just as monetary flows have assumed a central role in the international economy, the ability of the state to regulate these flows has all but evaporated.

It is a fanciful and dangerous conceit to imagine that a nation can command an arena shaped by non-state actors in much the same manner that it wields political or military power. "The United States has to send a signal to our allies," the President said recently, "that we know we are in a new world, and it's a world in which we are interdependent." If so, multinational firms are merely heeding the President's own message when they ignore the threat of U.S. sanctions and invest in Burma, Iran, and numerous other rogue states. Sanctions and embargoes, after all, run counter to the logic of interdependence, which leads to the elimination of trade barriers, not the erection of new ones.

In the game of trade, nations gain more by cooperating than by competing for power. The game of politics is otherwise—a fact obscured by the President's affinity for describing the global economy in terms of national competition. But American bond traders are not Marines, and the market cannot be relied on to bolster the aims of the state. To the contrary, if left unchecked it can just as easily subvert them.

THE DEFECTS of commercial diplomacy—its lack of strategic underpinnings, its tenuous moral legitimacy, its disjunction from anything resembling a truly national interest—have been apparent for decades. Security, political liberty, and national preeminence are not secondary goals, nor can they be achieved by means of sheer acquisitiveness. To pretend otherwise is to engage in an act of willful amnesia and hubris for which, some day, a suitably high price may be exacted.

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Observations

Art for Politics' Sake

Christopher Caldwell

This past October, the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) issued a major report on the state of the arts in America. Based on a series of public "forums" held in various American cities, *American Canvas* is packed with ostensibly good news. Between the founding of the NEA in 1965 and today, it seems, the agency has fulfilled and overfulfilled what in another place and time might have been called a five-year plan. The number of American opera companies has risen from 27 to 120, of dance companies from 37 to 400, of theaters from 56 to 425. If, in 1970, there were only 720,000 self-described "artists" in the country, today we have 1,671,000. Another 1.3 million Americans now work in the "nonprofit-arts" sector, accounting for $37 billion in productivity and $3.4 billion in taxes.

American Canvas is subtitled "An Arts Legacy for Our Communities," and this remarkable story of expansion, for which the NEA takes a large share of credit, might seem to be legacy enough. But the agency is well aware that others hold a different view; indeed, the overall tone of its report is less celebratory than defensive. For the fact is that the NEA is held in deep distrust. Since 1989, when controversy broke out over grants made for the late Robert Mapplethorpe's sadomasochistic photographs of male nudes and Andres Serrano's rendering of a crucifix submerged in urine, the NEA has lost 9 percent of its public funding in real terms. Nor is the distrust limited to the hard-line conservatives who led the charge against the controversial artworks. The last time the Roper organization polled Americans about the NEA (in 1995), 54 percent thought it should be eliminated.

American Canvas is fairly mum about the controversies over grants, alluding to them only obliquely, and piously noting that "artists are frequently in the front ranks of those asking difficult questions, exploring difficult terrain." Serrano and Mapplethorpe, though mentioned, are not discussed, and no direct reference is made to the NEA's role in the works they created. As for such NEA-sponsored "performance artists" as Karen Finley, who smeared her naked body with chocolate, and the now-forgotten showman who sprinkled paying audiences with his HIV-positive blood, they go unnamed. Electing neither to defend nor to apologize, the report simply dismisses the outcry over government-sponsored obscene art as a creation of the "shallow, often manipulative nature of the mass media."

Who, then, is to blame for the distrust in which the NEA is held? *American Canvas* offers two answers to this question. The more predictable one targets the incorrigible philistinism of the American public: the report laments that the $4.31 billion spent annually on live performances by nonprofit art groups "is less than half of what Americans [pay] for flowers, seeds, and potted plants." But, as if aware of the sterility of this particular line of argument—it involves attacking the very people the NEA means to court—the authors of *American Canvas* have come up with a different, indeed a diametrically opposed, answer to the same question.

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The real problem, in the present view of the NEA, is not that Americans are too philistine but—to the contrary—that the "arts community" itself has become too elitist. "In building an intricate network of public and private support," *American Canvas* notes, "thousands of institutions over the past four decades may have stressed the specialized, professional aspects of the arts at the expense of their more pervasive participatory nature." In this sentence, and many others like it throughout the report, the NEA is signaling a major shift in policy.

WHAT WOULD it mean for the arts to manifest "their more pervasive participatory nature"? We seem to have here yet another instance of the by-now familiar plea for artistic "inclusiveness"—that is, for breaking down the distinctions between high culture and low, in favor of the latter. This is certainly what the Clinton administration seems to have had in mind in recently naming William Ivey, a folklorist and the head of the Country Music Foundation, to succeed the outgoing Jane Alexander as chairman of the NEA. And it is what a number of the participants in the public forums on which *American Canvas* is based had in mind as well. Thus, the folklorist William Wilson argued:

> We must move away from the notion that art can only be found on the museum wall, at the concert hall, or on the performing stage. We must understand that art includes the expressive behaviors of ordinary people . . . things that we make with our words (songs, stories, rhymes, proverbs), with our hands (quilts, knitting, rawhide braiding, pie-crust designs, dinner-table arrangements, garden layouts), and with our actions (birthday and holiday celebrations, worship practice, playtime activities, work practices).

But though *American Canvas* hardly dismisses the artistic value of rawhide braiding and pie-crust designs, its true concern is less with the *forms* of art than with its *function*. And here, its vision is quite breathtakingly large. A hint of the NEA's broader intentions can be gleaned from the adulatory treatment accorded in the report to the Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art (SECCA) in Winston-Salem, North Carolina—the same gallery that so angered Senator Jesse Helms when it displayed Andres Serrano's *Piss Christ*.

According to *American Canvas*, SECCA has now embarked on a much more helpful course. Abandoning "the 'in-your-face' stance that previously characterized much public and political art," the gallery seeks to become "a testing ground for a new kind of public art—one that could promote productive social change while introducing challenging new art forms to the community." In line with this promising new thrust, SECCA has, for example, funded an exhibit made of tobacco products; a play done by the Drop Out Prevention Program at a local high school; a history of slavery called *Insight: In Site: Incite: Memory*; and an unspecified "project that will address the concerns of Latino migrant farmworkers in the Winston-Salem area."

Nor is SECCA alone. Every one of the local arts organizations in America's 50 largest cities, the report proudly notes, now uses its federal arts money for similarly activist ends. Ninety-three percent are involved in issues of cultural or racial awareness, 88 percent in encouraging "youth at risk," and 63 percent in "crime prevention"; the last-named are mostly gang initiatives, which involve bringing rival "crews" together to paint murals and put on plays.

This, in a nutshell, is the NEA's understanding of the art it should now be sponsoring: art that, whether high, low, or middle, is always and everywhere harnessed to the ends of social policy, to government, and to politics:

> No longer restricted solely to the sanctioned arenas of culture, the arts would be literally suffused throughout the civic structure, finding a home in a variety of community service and economic-development activities—from youth programs and crime prevention to job training and race relations—far afield from the traditional aesthetic functions of the arts.

THE OLD NEA high-mindedly rejected the notion that its grant-making decisions were or could be influenced by political or ideological considerations; art was an autonomous creative endeavor, and had to be protected from those who would dictate either its forms or its functions. *American Canvas*, too, ritualistically invokes the sacred principle that art be kept "as free as possible from the vagaries of politics." But this is mere boilerplate. Jane Alexander herself has put its new mission quite bluntly: the arts, she has said, need to be molded into "a new citizens movement, one that will do for the cultural environment what the 'green revolution' did for the natural environment." Or, in the words of the report, artists must "insist on their place at the table of civic discourse and government."

If the rhetoric again sounds Clintonite, it should. The utilitarian aim of *American Canvas* is to create a "new NEA" much as Clinton created the New Democrats: by mainstreaming the agenda of the Left, wrapping it in the uplifting mantle of populism, and coopting as many sources of real or potential opposition as possible. Even the promises partake of Clinton-style grandiosity. Not only will the new program of the NEA serve the multiculturalist aim of "pulling us as diverse groups and cultures together," it will, we are assured, improve our children's school performance, contribute to the "quality of life," foster "civic pride and participation," stimulate the economy, and attract tourists.

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By transforming the arts from a cultural into a governmental commodity, and one ranging "far afield from the traditional aesthetic functions of the arts," the NEA clearly hopes to justify its continued existence on a cost-benefit basis: in return for so much federal support of the arts, the "arts community" will contribute so much to the furtherance of (the Democrats') federal policy. Whether the ploy will work with Congress is anybody's guess. But what is astounding—or, perhaps, all too understandable—is that the artistic and cultural elites of the country, so quick to rally to the defense of the NEA when it was under "political" attack by the likes of Jesse Helms, have had virtually nothing to say about this naked assertion by the Endowment itself that art is to be valued to the extent that it can be mobilized for approved political ends. *American Canvas*, whose arguments would have brought a blush to the cheek of a cultural commissar in Soviet Russia, marks a pitiful coda to the career of a now hopelessly corrupt institution.

Music

Does Lincoln Center Still Matter?

Terry Teachout

THIRTY-FIVE years after opening its doors, New York's Lincoln Center, America's first and largest arts complex, is still the most important organization of its kind. Lincoln Center's four chief "constituents"—the New York Philharmonic, the Metropolitan Opera, New York City Opera, and New York City Ballet—set the agenda for lesser institutions throughout the country. Their performances are seen, in person or on public television, by millions each year.

Yet, for all its power and influence, Lincoln Center is showing unmistakable signs of trouble. Its two latest ventures, Jazz at Lincoln Center and the Lincoln Center Festival, have been less than successful; neither the Philharmonic nor the Met currently has a major-label recording contract; and declining ticket sales have forced New York City Ballet to curtail its performing schedule.

To some degree, it is true, these developments reflect the fact that the children of the baby boom are less interested than their parents in high culture. It is also true—and no less significant—that none of Lincoln Center's constituents has yet come fully to terms with the decline of the modern movement in art and the emergence of postmodernism. Finally, the leadership of the Met, the Philharmonic, and New York City Ballet is aging, at a time when arts administrators across America are acutely aware of the need to appeal to the next generation.

Whether Lincoln Center flourishes in the coming period will obviously depend in large part on the skill and imagination of the new and presumably younger leaders who will likely take over at some point in the next decade. No doubt, it will remain the country's foremost arts complex. But will it still be vital, and will it still play a leading role?

THE VIRTUES and vices of Kurt Masur, the New York Philharmonic's music director since 1991, have not changed since I last wrote about him in these pages.* Masur continues to give sound and frequently even inspired performances of the classics, and the Philharmonic continues to play beautifully for him. By the same token, his well-attended programs remain conventional to a fault, and his interest in contemporary music in general and in American music in particular—including the accessible and attractive scores of the new tonalists—is still modest.

Whether Masur and the Philharmonic can continue to draw crowds

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* "Two Cheers for Kurt Masur," August 1995.

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by playing it safe remains to be seen. The slow but steady aging of the orchestra's core audience can be observed by anyone who attends its Avery Fisher Hall concerts. Furthermore, Masur has failed altogether to impose his personality on the American musical scene. As a result, what was once one of the best-known symphony orchestras in the world is now an essentially provincial ensemble, justly admired by local concertgoers but exerting no shaping force on the larger world of art.

Something similar has happened to New York City Ballet in the decade and a half since the death of George Balanchine, who founded the company in 1948 and served as its ballet master-in-chief and principal choreographer throughout the first 35 years of its existence. During Balanchine's lifetime, City Ballet (as it is known to dancegoers) was without question the most important company in America, regularly premiering the work not only of the greatest choreographer of the 20th century—Balanchine himself—but also of America's outstanding native-born classicist, Jerome Robbins.

But City Ballet has long since ceased to be a creative institution in any meaningful sense of the word. Robbins, now seventy-nine, makes dances only on rare occasions. Peter Martins, who succeeded Balanchine in 1983, continues to turn out one or two new ballets each year, but none of them has yet entered the international repertory or won the admiration of more than a few loyal critics. The other works premiered by the company since Balanchine's death have been mostly undistinguished, and only one young classical choreographer now associated with City Ballet, Christopher Wheeldon, appears to have the potential to develop into a major talent.

To make matters worse, while persisting in packing City Ballet's repertory with uninteresting new works, Martins devotes proportionately less attention (and rehearsal time) to the ballets of Balanchine. "In the late 1970's," Joan Acocella noted last year in the *Wall Street Journal*, "three-quarters of repertory-evening performances were devoted to [Balanchine's] ballets. Now the figure has dropped to less than half." At the same time, the company's gifted young dancers, for all their undeniable virtuosity, have grown less able to bring to Balanchine's work a convincing sense of style, and many dancegoers are now looking to such regional companies as Miami City Ballet and Seattle's Pacific Northwest Ballet for meticulously rehearsed, stylistically assured stagings of such Balanchine masterpieces as *Jewels*, *Divertimento No. 15*, and *The Four Temperaments*.

AS FOR the Metropolitan Opera, the chief obstacle to change there is ironically not leadership but architecture. James Levine, who became the company's music director in 1976 and was named artistic director ten years later, has galvanized the Met's once-moribund orchestra and made a valiant effort to freshen its notoriously old-fashioned repertory. But the 3,800-seat Metropolitan Opera House is simply far too large to permit anything like a truly daring artistic policy: there are not enough Met subscribers willing to support such a policy by filling the seats. This bodes ill for such forthcoming events as the world premiere of John Harbison's *The Great Gatsby* (scheduled for the 1999-2000 season) and the company premieres of Ferruccio Busoni's *Doktor Faust*, Sergei Prokofiev's *War and Peace*, and Arnold Schoenberg's *Moses und Aron*.

The size of the Metropolitan Opera House also works to the detriment of the company in a less obvious way: not many singers are capable of making an impression in so large a house. Luciano Pavarotti and Placido Domingo, two big-voiced tenors with outsized personalities, are the singers who consistently draw the fullest crowds at the Met. Except for the mezzo-soprano Cecilia Bartoli, whose voice does not permit her to sing more than a few carefully chosen roles, there is no one else on the roster whose popularity comes anywhere near to these two tenors, both of whom are close to retirement age.

Artistically speaking, there is yet another serious disadvantage to the Met's size: it interferes with the mounting of theatrically convincing productions. The style favored by the best contemporary opera directors presupposes an audience close enough to the stage to respond immediately to the dramatic interaction of the singers. Not surprisingly, Levine and his general manager, Joseph Volpe, are finding it difficult to attract directors and designers capable of making effective use of the Met's 54-foot square stage opening, which is suited to large-scale spectacles and little else.

Of the company's last dozen or so productions, only two, Mark Lamos's powerful staging of Alban Berg's *Wozzeck* (which did poorly at the box office) and Cesare Lieve's surrealistic version of Rossini's *La Cenerentola* (mounted as a vehicle for Cecilia Bartoli), have been first-rate. Several others were appallingly bad—Franco Zeffirelli's overblown *Carmen*, premiered last season, was the worst new production of a repertory opera I have seen at the Met in the past decade—and the rest middling in quality.

THE LONG-TERM danger to the Met is that younger operagoers, products of an age that emphasizes dramatic values over world-class singing (in part, admittedly, because the latter is now so rare), will be put off by its unadventurous production style. Baby-boom and Generation-X audiences, raised on film and television, favor a wider-ranging repertory and faster-moving, more stimulating stagings. It is, indeed, to them that "the new City Opera," as

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New York City Opera is now called in its advertising, has deliberately begun to cater.

Under Paul Kellogg, who became the company's general and artistic manager just two years ago, City Opera has broken sharply with its recent past. During this season it will have opened eight new productions, the largest number by a New York company since the Met moved to Lincoln Center in 1966. They include the New York premiere of Tobias Picker's *Emmeline*, the U.S. premiere of Tan Dun's *Marco Polo*, and the company premieres of Handel's *Xerxes*, Gluck's *Iphigénie en Tauride*, Rossini's *L'Italiana in Algeri*, and Benjamin Britten's *Paul Bunyan*; also new are Donizetti's *Don Pasquale* and Verdi's *Macbeth*, neither of which has been performed by City Opera since the 50's.

The style in which these operas are being produced has been summed up by Kellogg as follows:

> Opera is drama. That goes for older operas, too. Old or new, the productions that work for me are fresh, interesting, provoking, touching—and *real*. I don't like stock operatic production [with its] gestures [that] one sees only on the opera stage, and nowhere else in the world.

Not all of the City Opera productions premiered to date have been equally effective. But the best ones—in particular Stephen Wadsworth's elegant *Xerxes*, which featured the brilliant singing of mezzo-soprano Lorraine Hunt and countertenor David Daniels—rank among the most theatrically distinguished operatic performances to be given in New York in the 90's.

As I have suggested previously in COMMENTARY,* City Opera, too, suffers from "architectural" problems, and the success of Kellogg's attempt to revive this institution may hinge on his ability to overcome the intrinsic limitations of the New York State Theater. The acoustics of the 2,700-seat house are erratic (it was designed not for opera but for performances by Balanchine's New York City Ballet), and its size, though not so problematic as the Met's, is still incompatible with the theatrical approach now favored by the company. So far, however, both critics and audiences have been responding positively to the "new" City Opera, and it seems at least possible that Kellogg's hopes for the company will eventually be realized.

BUT THIS returns us to the question of Lincoln Center as a whole. Many observers now feel that it was a mistake to place so much of New York's performing-arts activity under a single organizational roof. Architecturally, Lincoln Center is generally regarded as a failure, and the high overhead and consequent artistic disadvantages entailed by the size of the Metropolitan Opera House and the New York State Theater have hardly helped matters.

But was Lincoln Center ever *meant* to be a center of creativity? Robert Moses, the city planner who did more than anyone else in the 20th century to reshape New York, had a vision for the complex that was, in fact, not artistic but utilitarian: he saw it as an engine of urban renewal. Moses cared far less for music and ballet than for the wholesale razing of tenements and the subsequent creation (in his words) of "a reborn West Side, marching north from Columbus Circle, and eventually spreading over the entire dismal and decayed West Side."

Moses achieved his goal: the "dismal and decayed" Upper West Side of the 50's has since become an affluent residential area. And the Lincoln Center model has, predictably enough, been adopted by other cities seeking to revitalize their blighted downtown areas. The avowed purpose of the newly opened New Jersey Performing Arts Center, for example, is to lure nervous suburbanites back to Newark's inner city, which was devastated by riots in 1967.

Unfortunately, art rarely flourishes when it is used as a means to an end. Perhaps the most far-reaching *aesthetic* consequence of Robert Moses's vaulting ambitions for Lincoln Center was, paradoxically, the institutional conservatism that has been imposed on its occupants, who must keep scrupulously to the middle of the road in order to fill the seats of its huge theaters night after night.

To be sure, such charismatic figures as George Balanchine and Leonard Bernstein were capable of persuading their audiences to follow them artistically wherever they went. But geniuses cannot be hired at will. In their absence, New York City Ballet and the New York Philharmonic have largely ceased to play a role in the development of contemporary American art, while the Metropolitan Opera and New York City Opera struggle against lengthening odds to recapture their artistic vitality.

One wonders whether the directors of the arts complexes across the country that have so conscientiously modeled themselves on Lincoln Center realize how stultifying its legacy may ultimately prove to be.

* "Not the Metropolitan Opera," December 1996.

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Books in Review

Blaming the Victim

Esau's Tears:
Modern Anti-Semitism
and the Rise of the Jews
by Albert S. Lindemann
Cambridge. 568 pp. $34.95

Reviewed by
Robert S. Wistrich

WHAT ACCOUNTS for anti-Semitism—one of the most enduring and persistent hatreds in human history?

Some historians have seen it as a product of dysfunctional societies in which chimerical fantasies about Jews have taken hold. Others have emphasized the role of Christian anti-Judaism and the dehumanizing stereotypes it helped to form in the Middle Ages. Still others have pointed to factors ranging from economic pressure to ethnic hatred, xenophobia, and the universal need for scapegoats. Finally, there have been those who, recognizing that Jews have not been simply the powerless or passive objects of prejudice, view Judaism itself—and the challenge it poses to non-Jews—as a contributing element.

It is one thing, however, to recognize that Jews have interacted with their persecutors in complicated ways, and wholly another to present them as largely *responsible* for the irrational hatreds to which they have so often fallen victim. Yet that is what Albert S. Lindemann, a history professor at the University of California, Santa Barbara, has now done in this deeply pernicious book.

Esau's Tears focuses on relations between Gentiles and Jews in Europe and the United States over the course of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th. In Germany and Austria these relations are characterized by Lindemann as "ambiguous failures," in Britain and America as "ambiguous successes," and in Russia and Romania as outright failures. France is dealt with briefly, and there is also a side glance at Hungary and Italy. But despite the differences among these societies, in all of them, Lindemann argues, the central catalyst of anti-Semitism was the growing economic and political influence of the Jews themselves, to which the prejudices that emerged were an understandable and even justified reaction. As he puts it in a summary statement: "Jewish action in the real world has had something quite relevant to do with hatred of Jews."

Consider the two outright "failures," Romania and Russia. Over the course of the 19th century, Lindemann tells us, Romania, an impoverished country, was flooded by a mass movement of Yiddish-speaking Polish and Russian Jews, many of them deeply religious Hasidim, who insisted on living apart and on retaining their foreign language and culture. And even the indigenous Jewish bourgeoisie "refused to become Romanian and in truth *did* threaten native Romanians" by outstripping them in economic competition. With their "inferior morals" and "characteristic Jewish vices," the

ROBERT S. WISTRICH *is professor of modern European and Jewish history at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. His books include* Anti-Semitism: The Longest Hatred *and* Weekend in Munich: Art, Propaganda, and Terror in the Third Reich.

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Robert Krell, editor

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Jews, natives and newcomers alike, not only exploited the Romanian people but actively spread exaggerated reports of anti-Jewish prejudice in Romanian society.

But in fact, according to Lindemann, Romania's reputation as a land of narrow-minded backwardness was undeserved; he cites one source testifying that Romanians were "the most tolerant of all Christian peoples." The impression of bigotry was fomented instead by "prominent Jews" who had "taken a leading role" in the "mean-spirited denigration" of the country. When Romania's leaders repressed the Jews and denied them civic equality, they were therefore pursuing a "justifiable policy."

LINDEMANN'S PORTRAIT of Russia proceeds along similar lines. There, too, anti-Semitism was "hardly a hatred without palpable or understandable cause." Most Jews were not interested in assimilating into the broader society, choosing instead to maintain their social distance, and they were religiously intolerant to boot. Moreover, Czar Nicholas II (1868-1918) was "undoubtedly correct" that growing numbers of Jews "wanted to destroy him and his empire"—government officials were being assassinated by Jewish anarchists and nihilists—and while he or his ministers might have indulged in some conspiratorial fantasies, "they were not wrong in believing that Jews were a power in the world."

As for the pogroms from which Jews in the Russian empire suffered at the turn of the century, these, Lindemann writes, were not entirely what they seemed. For one thing, Jews themselves engaged in violent tactics; for another, as in the terrible Kishinev pogrom of 1903, they exaggerated and falsified the numbers of their dead, offering "lurid" accounts to attract sympathy and relief funds and to wage a public-relations campaign against the Czar. An analogous pattern characterized Jewish behavior down into the period following the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917.

IS IT necessary to say that both these accounts are nothing but a gross and mendacious caricature? To begin with Romania, the easily documented truth is that Jews immigrating to that country became acculturated very quickly, not only learning the language of their new homeland but in many cases becoming fierce Romanian patriots. Indeed, it was precisely their drive to embrace Romanian culture, and not the inclination of certain hasidic communities to retain their separateness, that caused the greatest anxiety among Romanian anti-Semites, whose ferocity and sadism are matters of indisputable historical record.

Lindemann's examination of Russia is similarly bizarre. It is bizarre in the details—in support of his assertion that Jews themselves adopted violent anti-social tactics, he cites a riot in Warsaw in 1905 in which *Jewish* socialists attacked *Jewish* pimps and prostitutes—and it is bizarre in the large. The deep-seated anti-Semitic attitudes present in Russian society for centuries are mentioned by Lindemann almost in passing. About the prejudices that permeated the Orthodox church, he says next to nothing. Most strikingly of all, one searches in vain for a single reference in this book to what is probably the most representative and certainly the deadliest concoction of turn-of-the-century Russian anti-Semitism, namely the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*.

To be sure, the wide acceptance this scurrilous forgery enjoyed in Russia and many other places—with its fantastic thesis that satanic Jews were ruling the world, remorselessly fomenting wars and revolutions—would tend rather to undercut Lindemann's central argument that anti-Semitism is a response always and everywhere to the actual misdeeds of Jews. In this light, his decision not to mention the existence of the *Protocols* becomes all too understandable.

WERE THE task not so tedious, and so distasteful, one could go on cataloguing the faults of Lindemann's "history." Suffice it to note that, although some chapters are more balanced than others, his presentation throughout is marked not only by sympathy for the arguments of anti-Semites but by an undisguised antipathy toward Judaism and Jews. Echoing common anti-Semitic slurs through the ages, he assures us, for example, that biblical Jews "glorified unspeakably bestial acts"; that the book of Deuteronomy provides a "religious source for modern racism"; and that the Hebrew Bible as a whole justifies "policies of racial extermination." His bias against Jews surfaces in a slew of recurring stereotypes. In Russia and Eastern Europe they are described by him as backward, ragged, filthy, and parasitical, and their language, Yiddish, as "a nasal, whining, and crippled ghetto tongue"; in Western Europe and the United States he finds them arrogant and overbearing, and far too successful and domineering for their own or anyone's good. Everywhere they appear as degenerate, physically unattractive, tribalist, exploitative, and immoral.

The closing pages of this book are particularly strident, as Lindemann sets out to remind contemporary Jews of their alleged sins throughout history. In a malevolent and wide-ranging diatribe that proceeds without evidence of any kind, we are told that Jews "unquestionably did trade in slaves, own slaves, exploit blacks, and harbor racist attitudes to them," and that, in resisting the "notion of being held responsible for things that happened in the past," they are no better than Germans who seek to deny their own history of racism. These impassioned, indignant, simplistic, and tendentious pages make an especially curious counterpoint to Lin-

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demann's frequent rebukes to Jewish historians for their supposedly "impassioned," "indignant," "simplistic," and "tendentious" writings.

As for Lindemann's own knowledge of Jewish history, despite a smattering of Yiddish and Hebrew terms it appears little better than that of the anti-Semites whose arguments he echoes. Nor does he offer the slightest insight into the culture or self-understanding of the Jewish world on which he casts his heartless gaze. He shows no mastery of primary sources, no traces of having done archival research, and almost no familiarity with works in languages other than English or even with the most recent secondary literature in the subject on which he proposes to instruct others. It is appalling that Cambridge University Press has put its distinguished imprint on so profoundly biased and ignominious a work.

Out of Arkansas

Friends in High Places:
Our Journey From
Little Rock to Washington, D.C.
by Webb Hubbell
Morrow. 342 pp. $27.50

Reviewed by
Gabriel Schoenfeld

For five years now, a ceaseless series of scandals has dogged the highest officials of the Clinton administration, from the President, First Lady, and Vice President to various cabinet secretaries, White House staffers, and Democratic-party bigwigs. Although investigations and a steady drip of headlines continue, the public, to a large extent, seems to have become inured to the spectacle of the "most ethical administration in history" (in Bill Clinton's words) turning out to be one of the most scandal-plagued of all time. What, if anything, can be learned from the story of the single high-ranking official who went directly from the Clinton administration to washing windows in a federal prison?

As a partner in the prestigious Rose law firm in Little Rock, Arkansas, Webb Hubbell began to run afoul of the law well before the Clinton administration came to power. His transgressions flowed from a simple cause: the compulsion to live above and beyond his means. By the late 1980's, as stress turned to desperation, Hubbell found one last way to stay afloat. "I didn't really set out to steal from my partners and my clients," he writes in *Friends in High Places*. "I intended only to borrow." But the false expense receipts Hubbell submitted for reimbursement came to $482,000, a sum he was not in a position to return.

Even as he was "borrowing" from his partners, though, Hubbell was being swept upward by Bill Clinton's electoral success. The day after the 42nd President was inaugurated, Hubbell was assigned a stately chamber in the Department of Justice and sworn in as assistant to the Attorney General of the United States. A tumultuous and exhilarating year followed as he helped the President get through one difficulty after another: selecting an Attorney General, dealing with the standoff in Waco, Texas, and setting legal policy on issues ranging from airline hijackings to health care.

Then the past caught up with the present. The Rose law firm had reviewed its former partner's billing sheets, and was threatening to report him to the authorities unless it was made whole. Unable to come up with the cash, in March 1994 Hubbell resigned from office. Indicted for felony mail and tax fraud,

Gabriel Schoenfeld *is senior editor of* Commentary.

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he pleaded guilty and in August 1995 reported to prison, where he served eighteen months.*

Such, as Hubbell tells them, are the bare facts of his rise and fall. Reviewers have been quick to dismiss this memoir as a self-serving account that adds nothing to what we already know about the scandals surrounding the President. But the book is revealing in important—if unintended—ways. For one thing, *Friends in High Places* describes in lush detail the peculiar relationship that would end in the most searing trauma the Clintons have suffered thus far. For another thing, it tells us a good deal about the kind of stuff the Arkansas crowd is made of.

IN 1976, in the course of legal business in northwest Arkansas, the unflappable and ultra-demure Vincent Foster, another partner at the Rose firm and a man who, in Hubbell's description, seems to have "never made the stop at childhood," encountered a recent Yale law-school graduate named Hillary Rodham. He returned to Little Rock "raving, uncharacteristically," about her charms and her intelligence, and determined to recruit her into the all-male firm.

To say that Foster, Hubbell, and Hillary Rodham became fast friends while toiling together in Rose's litigation department would understate the matter. Her effect on the two men was overpowering, beginning with her unconventionality. Apart from being a "brilliant young lawyer," she sported frizzy hair, glasses that were "bulky and unfeminine," and no makeup; she had not taken her husband's name, and did not always show due deference to other partners' wives. "Vince and I were mesmerized," Hubbell writes, adding at another point that "she was like nobody we had ever been around before" and at still another that she was "an explorer . . . like Meriwether Lewis and William Clark," who "came to Arkansas and redrew the maps."

The threesome became regular dining partners—"our Italian lunches started as just meals, but eventually they became escapes"—and Hillary also joined the men at "lingerie style shows" in local restaurants, where scantily clad models conveyed their wares from table to table. To "challenge" Foster's reserve, she hired a belly dancer to perform at his birthday party. In return, "Vince and I each shared a part of ourselves with Hillary that we shared with no other woman." "We enjoyed her, respected her, loved her."

All this closeness must have been diverting beyond words for two married, middle-aged attorneys who had much to be diverted from: in Vincent Foster's case, internal demons driving him to unobtainable perfection; in Webb Hubbell's, a troubled conscience and a mounting pile of debts. But with Bill Clinton's presidential victory, and with the removal of both men to Washington, the bonds of affection began inexplicably to wither. In Washington, Hubbell writes, Hillary was no longer a co-worker across the corridor; she was a supreme power in the land, and not always a friendly one at that. Comradeship with an alluring partner was transmogrified into the *angst* of the Washington beltway: was Hubbell in the "inner circle," or had he been "forgotten"? When he was finally forced to tender his resignation, on top of disgrace came a special pain—"I never heard from Hillary at all."

For Vincent Foster, in his new post as deputy counsel to the President, altered ties imposed yet a steeper price. Charged with the job of shielding the Clintons from scandal, and failing, Foster began to break under the harsh light of media exposure. From Hillary, instead of the former tenderness of a confidante, there was a hissing "Fix it Vince," "Handle it Vince." "'It's just not the same,'" Hubbell reports Foster lamenting. As the Clinton scandals deepened from Travelgate to Whitewater and beyond, so did his despair. On July 20, 1993, six months into the first Clinton term, Foster drove to Fort Marcy Park in northern Virginia and put a bullet in his head.

HUBBELL'S JAUNT to and hard descent from the pinnacle of power, Foster's misery and tortured end, Hillary Clinton's metamorphosis under the spell of power—this is the stuff of melodrama. But for the last five years these people, and others like them, have been running the government of the United States. What convictions, if any, do they hold, and toward what ends have they sought power?

In the department of political ideas, *Friends in High Places* is wafer-thin. On several occasions Hubbell describes himself at the dawn of his career as "idealistic," but what he means by this is left unclear. Even though he saw "the racial injustice that existed all around," he took no part in the civil-rights movement. And even though he admired Arkansas's Senator J. William Fulbright for opposing the American role in Vietnam, and his friends were taking part in antiwar demonstrations, "I sat on my couch . . . reading Herman Hesse and listening to Simon and Garfunkel." In midlife, though an enrolled Democrat, he flirted with a run for the U.S. Senate on the Republican line; it was, said those encouraging him to take the plunge, "the Republicans' time."

The officeholders from Arkansas who flit in and out of these pages appear similarly insouciant, similarly ambitious, and similarly apolitical (if that is the right word). Even the Clintons, though clearly of a more activist hue, come across as 99 parts ambition and avarice, one part

* Hubbell remains under investigation by the special prosecutor Kenneth Starr in connection with work he performed at the Rose law firm on the Whitewater real-estate-development project and, after he was released from prison, for overbilling the city of Los Angeles and for payments he received from the Indonesian Lippo Group and others for "consulting" or, possibly, to buy his silence.

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60's radicalism. No compunctions whatsoever stopped Hillary Rodham, as a partner at Rose, from litigating against low-income consumers in a utility-rate case. "Instead of defending poor people and righting wrongs," recalls Hubbell, "we found ourselves squarely on the side of corporate greed against the little people."

The Bill Clinton who emerges through Hubbell's eyes is no less elastic, only far more energetic; he appears in these pages "burning with ambition," determined to be President from an early age, constantly positioning himself, adjusting direction, cloaking himself in one cause after another.

Empty ambition is an old story in American politics. It hardly explains every alliance the Clinton administration has struck, or every policy it has advanced. But it does go some way toward explaining the malfeasance, the improprieties, and the constant stretching and bending of the rules that by now have become our national daily fare. When the final tally is made of the damage done by this presidency to the fabric of American political life, Webb Hubbell, in his own pitiable way, may turn out to have been as representative a figure as any, and also to have told things pretty much as they were.

Profit Without Honor

Frozen Desire:
The Meaning of Money
by James Buchan
Farrar, Straus & Giroux. 320 pp. $25.00

Reviewed by
David Brooks

Not many fledgling journalists dream of writing for the financial pages. Most start with ambitions that are rather more literary in nature. But money has to be earned; a job opens up; and a career is launched. To their surprise, some then find that the business world actually offers a compelling beat. But while the wheeling and dealing of the big players has its allure, many business writers still tend to suffer from the mental burden of covering seemingly unsophisticated or uneducated people who earn more in a month than they do in a year.

James Buchan seems to have this problem in spades. A British writer with a superb education, an adventurous spirit, highbrow tastes, and a grandfather (John Buchan) who was a famous novelist, he has labored for many years as a correspondent for the *Financial Times*—a noble soul locked in the most pecuniary of papers. To make matters more complicated, Buchan is obviously one of those who at some point become fascinated with their subject. He is as proud of his understanding of the grammar of finance as he is of his command of Latin and his polished German. And yet, true to type, he has never quite made his peace with the capitalist world. To the contrary, as this book makes clear, he loathes money with an overriding passion, and dreams of a society without it.

Frozen Desire is an eclectic history of what has been said and thought about money. Starting in the classical age, Buchan speeds straight up through Michael Milken, mining the writings of the greats in literature (Cervantes, Shakespeare, Baudelaire, Dostoevsky), philosophy (Bacon, Mill, Santayana), and economics (Smith, Keynes) for wisdom bearing on his topic. He describes the doings of financial whizzes and scoundrels, and for spice and filler throws in chunks of autobiography and family history. Throughout, Buchan is an eloquent expositor; if he tends, intellectually, to be a show-off, he is at the same time a provocative guide.

As his account abundantly confirms, Buchan is hardly the first person to see money as the root of all evil. Aristotle, for one, preceded him, condemning profit and interest income in a passage Buchan ranks as among the most influential ever written. In fact, Buchan argues, what made the classical age noble was that men fought for vengeance and honor rather than for monetary gain, and when they were not fighting they were content to satisfy their natural needs rather than being obsessed with the limitless desires that currency would introduce into the world.

From ancient Greece, Buchan cruises forward to the New Testament, noting that for many early Church leaders, Jesus's most important attribute after his divinity was his poverty. (For contrast, Buchan dwells at length on the story of Judas, the man corrupted by

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coins.) Medieval Europe, continues Buchan, was essentially a moneyless place, and his portrait of life in the feudal era is correspondingly rosy: people lived within the rhythms of nature, and each place was unique and tranquil.

But the Middle Ages yielded to the Renaissance, when the spread of money transformed everything. "The land itself begins to change," Buchan writes. Instead of selecting crops to meet local needs, farmers started to grow what was profitable. Lords no longer needed to live on the land. Kings found they could pay for standing armies. As Buchan summarizes: "The medieval dream of a fixed world of stable commercial and moral values, of good money and just prices, earthly duty and heavenly reward, gives way."

All the rest is decline and corruption, typified by the figure who best qualifies as the nemesis of Buchan's book, the Scotsman John Law. In 1715, Law offered to rescue the nearly bankrupt French government through an elaborate financial scheme. His system crashed, and France was badly burned.

Frozen Desire concludes with the prediction that our own whirling monetary regime, in which money is just a flashing series of digitalized notations that can be sent instantaneously around the world, will suffer a similar fate. And we will deserve it.

BUT WHO is "we"?

For many years, James Buchan was stationed in the United States, and as readers of his reportage in the *Financial Times* can attest, it is this country, past and present, that he considers to be the epitome of money corruption in the modern world. The framers of the U.S. Constitution, he writes, "resolved not to be free but rich, not good but rich, not equal but rich." Americans are so greedy that they "look without blinking at death." And because they think of nothing but their bank accounts, "Americans often do not like their heirs, who they fear will dissipate the money in lawyers' fees, foolish speculation, the entertainment industry."

It would be wrong to dismiss Buchan as a crank simply because he purports to loathe the riches he finds in this country (all the while building a successful career built on globe-trotting and expense accounts). He is better seen as an aspiring Ruskin or Carlyle, one of those dissenters who strike a necessary and even appealing note of anger and nostalgia while failing to put a halt to the processes they decry or to further the causes they advocate.

The problem is that the modern capitalist world is even more recalcitrant than the early industrial society that so exercised Ruskin and Carlyle, and not least because it already sounds many countervailing notes of its own. Some entrepreneurs, indeed, have managed to capitalize on this strange and fascinating phenomenon. Fortunes have been made not through appeals to naked avidity but through the effort to reconcile affluence with Buchan-style "naturalness." Far outstripping in ingenuity the fears of its most fevered critics, American capitalism has created a market in spirituality that, in products like organic groceries and environmentally sound cosmetics, caters to a population beset with the anxieties of abundance.

A whole generation of well-to-do, mainstream Americans is trying, however amusingly, to reap the delights of affluence without succumbing to the corruptions to which it can tend. The spectacle they offer to the eye is far richer and more intriguingly complex than anything imagined by those, like James Buchan, who can only dream idly of a moneyless world.

Will to Believe

God and the American Writer
by Alfred Kazin
Knopf. 259 pp. $25.00

Reviewed by
Carol Iannone

"WE MUST simply live without religion," the late Edmund Wilson used to admonish Alfred Kazin during their summer chats on Cape Cod. These words, reported by Kazin out of the mouth of "our last great man of letters," are redolent of the uncompromising secularism that had come to characterize intellectual and literary life in the mid-to-late 20th century.

And yet, religion—God—did not disappear. In recent years, indeed, intellectuals themselves seem to have taken a new interest in Him, and the interest has even extended into the relatively lightless area of literary criticism. Now Kazin, himself one of America's outstanding men of letters, has gone looking for involvements with divinity in the body of literature that has been his lifelong subject ever since his precocious 1942 study, *On Native Grounds*.

If God and religion are fairly fresh themes for Kazin as a critic, they are not altogether foreign to him as an autobiographer, as readers of *A Walker in the City* (1951), *Starting Out in the Thirties* (1965), and *New York Jew* (1978) have reason to know. But his fugitive statements on the subject in those books have tended to be fragmentary, or inchoate, a mixture of an almost mystical yearning for religious faith with an irascibly dismissive attitude toward religion as it is actually practiced by actual believers.

A colleague of mine recently remarked that while, in matters of race or gender, everyone agrees that

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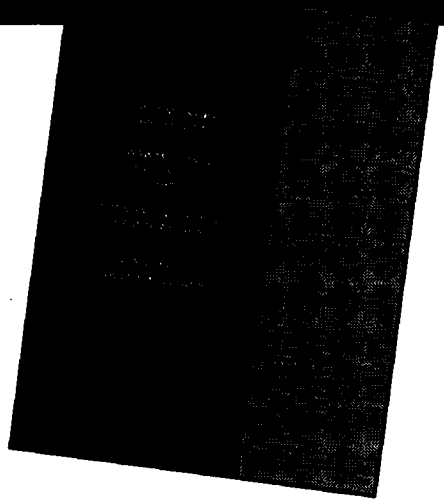

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"the personal is the political," public professions of religious belief infallibly cause discomfort in many intellectuals. They certainly do so in Alfred Kazin, a man for whom organized religion is coterminous with the forces of reaction. "What does [religion] mean," he cries in alarm,

> in an America where the great majority go to church, synagogue, and mosque, where many confess to believe in the Devil, where fundamentalists have captured the Republican party South and West, where every attempt is being made to brook no separation between church and state?

For Kazin, what it means is that "a politicized, intolerant, and paranoiac religion, always crowing of its popularity, is too public, and aims to coerce the rest of us."

Such, at any rate, is the temperament, itself highly politicized, of the man who hopes to find in American literature a deeper confrontation with religion and its role in human affairs.

IN THIS book Kazin works quickly through the early Puritan poets, for whom God was an absolute orthodox certainty but who, he seems to feel, left no access to belief for later generations. He then considers a series of 19th- and 20th-century writers—Hawthorne, Emerson, Melville, Whitman, Dickinson, Twain, William James, Eliot, Frost, Faulkner—each of whom grappled toward a highly individual understanding of God (or of His absence). There is also a chapter on the literary responses to slavery, including Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and one on Lincoln and his religious conceptualization of that great evil and of the war that was fought to end it.

In the case of each of the figures he considers, Kazin's method is to weave together some fairly close impressions of the writer's work with details drawn from the biographical and social context, adding references to other authors and garnishing the whole with well-chosen quotations. The approach can yield some richly evocative passages—as when, for example, Kazin comments on Herman Melville's visit to the Egyptian pyramids—but it is also scattershot in its effect, and peculiarly ill-suited to the elaboration of a general thesis.

IF THERE *is* a controlling idea in this book, it appears to be that the responses of American writers to God and religion, radically individualistic as they are, have failed to produce a basis for spiritual inspiration, or "radiance," in American letters. An interesting point—though Kazin's view of what would constitute spiritual "radiance" in literature is unfortunately never clear. If Transcendentalists like Emerson and Whitman are somehow too diffuse in their personalism for his taste, the great tragic figures of the 19th century, Hawthorne and Melville, are too locked in the residual legacy of their Calvinist background. T.S. Eliot's assiduous literary attempts at orthodoxy do not convince Kazin, but neither does William James's looser standard in *Varieties of Religious Experience*.

All this is frustrating enough, perhaps for Kazin as much as for the reader. He is, after all, the critic who once located in the "radical individualism" of American writers the very essence of a literature "on native grounds." Now, at the end of a long career, it appears that this same radical individualism strikes him as insufficient, indeed as having prevented the achievement of spiritual "radiance."

Whatever Kazin means by this, it is a commodity he appears to be personally in search of. When he remarks, for instance, that William James "wins us [only] as a fellow soul, not as a believer," his tone may be one of real regret. And when he reports in disappointment that "the intense pleasure I get from [Eliot's] *Four Quartets* is mostly in the ravishing lines, not in the supposed coming together of the Trinity in which the poem ends," one almost thinks that he, Alfred Kazin, wishes above all to be persuaded of the Trinity.

In the end, though, it is clearly only the idea of belief that intrigues him—without any attendant personal obligations, without any real intellectual assent, and certainly without any institutional trappings. In his conclusion, Kazin reprises his complaints about the public expressions of religiosity in America today, suggesting that faith as a "social experience" flourishes only when "genuine belief is lacking." Then, as if to offer a counterexample, he writes:

> The wonderfully harmonious Polish poet Czeslaw Milosz came out of the total infamy and horror of the Second World War to say in America, "Nothing could stifle my inner certainty that a shining point exists where all lines intersect." That is the European heritage from centuries of common worship in relatively homogeneous societies. The American writer . . . has (especially in our time) known no such heritage. In a very real sense he has no common religious heritage at all.

Of course, if one declines to extend credence to any form of religious expression that happens to be on offer, one is indeed unlikely to share a "common religious heritage" with one's fellows. That is not Milosz's problem, but it is assuredly Alfred Kazin's. After having been pulled this way and that by his teasings (and his tantrums), one almost yearns for the settled clarity of Edmund Wilson's simple, adult words of refusal.

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Trickle Down

The Character of Nations: How Politics Makes and Breaks Prosperity, Family, and Civility

by Angelo M. Codevilla

Basic Books. 340 pp. $27.00

Reviewed by
Daniel Casse

Angelo M. Codevilla is known for his bold essays on American defense and foreign policy, quite a few of which have appeared in these pages; here, he departs somewhat from his usual concerns to ask how, domestically, particular nations come to have the ways they do. The result is a sweeping work of theory, one that demonstrates, despite its flaws, just how much we in our own troubled times stand to learn from an understanding of politics that stretches back to the ancients.

In *The Character of Nations*, Codevilla, who teaches international relations at Boston University, sets out to show that different forms of government differently shape the lives of those who live under them, giving rise to distinctive habits in every realm from the economic, civic, and military to the familial and spiritual. This may sound uncontroversial, but as an approach to political reality it flies in the face of contemporary academic convention, according to which a nation's political system is usually seen as little more than a reflection of its "culture" or "life-style." For Codevilla (as for classic philosophers from Aristotle to Machiavelli), just the opposite is the case.

Deploying a mixture of historical anecdotes, news reports, and a considerable knowledge of foreign cultures, Codevilla gives us vivid examples of the link between political arrangements and national character in the contemporary world. He shows, for instance, how the now-defunct Soviet system, characterized by lying, corruption, and the hoarding of personal power, lives on in the mores of today's Russian mafia. He recounts how the Swedish government, through measures designed to ensure equality between the sexes, altered the familial structure so radically that by 1980 nearly two-thirds of the residents of Stockholm were living alone. Whether he is describing the role of cash bribes in Mexico, the rising divorce rate in Taiwan, or the fondness of the Swiss for guns, Codevilla has illuminating things to say about the behavioral patterns that political systems foster.

As one might expect, though, the heart of this book is a critical examination of the United States. Codevilla begins, properly enough, with Alexis de Tocqueville's observations in *Democracy in America*. Touring the United States in 1831, Tocqueville found a country remarkable for its religiosity, economic freedom, and commitment to equality. More remarkable still (to European eyes), these qualities flourished without the aid of powerful national institutions. They were fostered instead by local government and a strong ethos of responsibility and participation: Americans were filled with community spirit, Tocqueville argued, because the same people who made the laws enforced them.

This era, Codevilla maintains, was the golden age of American civic virtue, a time when the vision of the founders was most fully realized. How, then, did the spirit that forged it evanesce, especially over the last several generations?

The chief culprits, in Codevilla's account, are those policy-makers

Daniel Casse *is a senior director of the White House Writers Group, a public-policy communications firm.*

Once upon a time, there was a young man named Ken who collected books. Soon, there were so many books, and so little room, that he realized he had to become a bookdealer and move to bigger digs.

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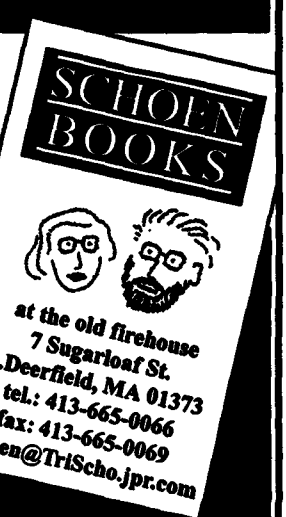

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who, from the era of the Great Society in the 1960's to the present, have worked assiduously to expand the reach of government and thereby to undermine popular habits of self-reliance. In areas from agricultural policy to religious liberty, regulatory agencies and the courts have run roughshod over the institutions of limited, representative government. The result, Codevilla writes, is that were Tocqueville to pay a return visit today,

> he would find [that] the inhabitants of American towns were taking their concerns to the state or national capitals. . . . [He] would notice the scarcity of prominent citizens in public places. He would find they had retreated into buildings, suburbs, and gated communities governed for practical purposes as if the public laws did not exist. He would be struck by how much citizens concerned about crime talked about the police and the courts and how little they considered their own responsibility for public safety.

But the problem, in Codevilla's view, does not stop with the depredations of bureaucrats, judges, and politicians. No less a part of the new American "regime" are those centers of opinion, ranging from *Time* and *Newsweek* to the Sex Information and Education Council of the United States, that combine a faith in the entitlement-granting power of government with an essentially free-market approach to manners and morals. It is thanks to the views promulgated through these varied media that so many Americans now "order their souls" according to their rights, their pleasures, or both, seamlessly joining "the teachings of the Supreme Court and Hugh Hefner's *Playboy* philosophy."

AS THIS brief summary suggests, *The Character of Nations* is a relentlessly pessimistic book. Almost no aspect of the country's public or private life wins Codevilla's approval, and he seemingly forecloses any possibility of national renewal or of an awakening from our moral and cultural drift.

This fatalism arises, I believe, from a fault that Codevilla shares with the liberals he chastises: a tendency to focus overmuch on government and to discount the good sense and abiding vigor of the American people. Like his foes, Codevilla forgets that in America—even in its corrupted state—influence does not flow exclusively in one direction.

In fact, popular discontent with the handiwork of Codevilla's "establishment" has already spawned a great number of promising grassroots efforts at reform, from pro-family religious groups like the Promise Keepers (noted only in passing by Codevilla), to charter schools and voucher programs aimed at rescuing our dismal educational system, to local initiatives by police and residents to make the streets safe and reduce the incidence of violent crime. Even at the level of policy, where the new elites have long dominated, there are signs of progress, as pillars of the liberal agenda like affirmative action and welfare, judicial activism and economic regulation, have come under assault or are on the way out.

Needless to say, we are still far from recovering our social and political health. As Codevilla rightly suggests, thoroughgoing change will come about only if and when our noxious elite culture passes from the scene. But the grip of that culture on the lives of Americans is already not quite so tight as Codevilla would have us believe. Just as the American people themselves cannot be wholly absolved of complicity in some of the developments he deplores, especially on the moral and cultural front, so the "regime" is susceptible of correction by movements he would applaud. When it comes to America, at least, not even the most persuasive theory about "the character of nations" is ever quite adequate to reality.

Dissenter

The Ordeal of Integration: Progress and Resentment in America's "Racial" Debate

by Orlando Patterson

Perseus Counterpoint. 240 pp. $24.50

Reviewed by
Arch Puddington

ONCE TOUTED as a centerpiece of the Clinton administration's second-term agenda, the President's race-relations initiative has come under heavy fire in the few short months of its existence. His first televised "town-hall" meeting was widely regarded as a rambling gabfest, and his national commission on race has been lambasted for drawing its members primarily from the professional civil-rights establishment, a group notorious for resisting fresh thinking. Both efforts, as critics have observed, have revealed a notable reluctance in the President and his advisers to give a hearing not only to conservative opponents of affirmative action but also to the handful of liberal thinkers who dissent from today's orthodoxies.

Orlando Patterson certainly qualifies as a liberal dissenter. A professor of sociology at Harvard, born in Jamaica and educated at the London School of Economics, Patterson is the author of a study of freedom in Western culture that won the National Book Award in 1991, and he has also written highly regarded works on slavery and the nature of ethnic chauvinism. As we see from *The Ordeal of Integration*, a quirky, loosely organized, and often polemical study that ranges over issues like desegregation, professional race advocacy, the IQ controversy, and affirmative action, Patterson utterly rejects the unspoken premise that underlies the President's race-

ARCH PUDDINGTON *works for Freedom House in New York.*

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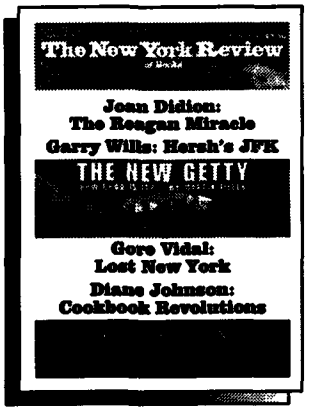

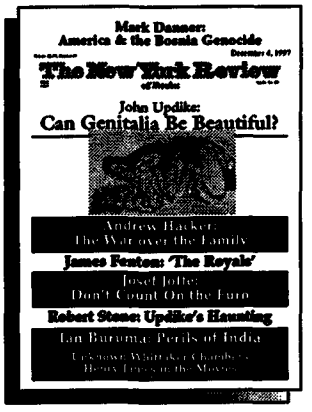

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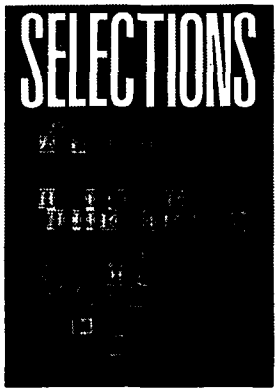

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relations initiative—namely, that America is a racist society in need of a cure.

On the contrary, Patterson asserts,

> there does not exist a single case in modern or earlier history that comes near to the record of America in changing majority attitudes, in guaranteeing legal and political rights, and in expanding socioeconomic opportunities for its disadvantaged minorities.

Not only is America the most tolerant multi-ethnic society in the world, but blacks here are better off now than at any time in our history.

Patterson goes even further. In the harshest terms, he denounces the current generation of black political leaders for instilling a conviction in poor, inner-city blacks that no matter what they do in an irredeemably racist America, they cannot get ahead. He also rejects the theory, elaborated by the sociologist William Julius Wilson, that black economic inequality is driven by the de-industrialization of American cities. Instead, Patterson sides with Daniel Patrick Moynihan in tracing inner-city poverty to the breakdown in black family structure; the vilification to which Moynihan was subjected for expounding this thesis in the mid-1960's, Patterson notes bitterly, set back our comprehension of black poverty by decades.

ALL THIS, of course, stands in the sharpest contrast to today's liberal pieties about race. It therefore comes as something of a surprise that Patterson emerges in this book as a committed supporter of affirmative action and racial preferences. To be sure, he eschews the usual argument that such measures are necessary to compensate for white racism. And, though a confirmed believer in integration, he does not rest his case on the ground that America needs more "diversity" in the workplace and in schools.

Rather, Patterson's support for racial preferences is based on his conviction that the legacy of slavery has seriously impeded blacks from fully participating in the economy, depriving them of certain basic skills and cultural tools. Thus, in Patterson's view, the proper purpose of affirmative action is not to counterbalance prejudice but to contribute to the creation of a black middle class, secure in its place in American economic life. Just as the government intervenes to regulate the environment or to break up monopolies, it has every right to take measures on behalf of the black poor.

ALTHOUGH *The Ordeal of Integration* is for the most part rigorously argued, the case Patterson makes for affirmative action is by far the weakest part of the book. For one thing, his insistence that racial preferences are just another attempt to smooth out the rough edges of the economy is simply not convincing. By denying there is anything extraordinary in a policy by which the state steps in to select winners and losers on the basis of skin color, Patterson enters treacherous intellectual terrain—especially for a scholar familiar with the calamitous results of such policies in other multi-ethnic societies around the world.

Furthermore, Patterson never comes to grips with why so many Americans object to racial preferences. He ascribes the upsurge of anti-affirmative-action sentiment to a sensation-seeking press that amplifies the voices of a few disgruntled white males and a chorus of conservative demagogues. This explanation is hardly persuasive.

If anything, the press has looked kindly on affirmative action, turning a blind eye to what it entails; serious investigative reporting on how such programs actually work is all but nonexistent. Moreover, discontent with affirmative action is far more widespread than Patterson concedes. Opinion survey after opinion survey shows a majority of Americans opposing racial preferences; the policy, the polls reveal, violates their sense of fairness and their conviction that Americans should be regarded first and foremost as individuals, not as members of a racial or ethnic group.

Patterson's dogmatic arguments in defense of affirmative action and the fierce rhetoric in which he couches them—he goes so far as to equate the social scientist Charles Murray with the white supremacist David Duke—leave the impression of a thinker anxious at all costs to distance himself from the conservatives with whom on so many issues he clearly agrees. His failure to address seriously the arguments of affirmative action's critics detracts from what is otherwise a thoughtful and thought-provoking book. It also deepens the well-grounded suspicion that good counterarguments on behalf of affirmative action simply cannot be found.

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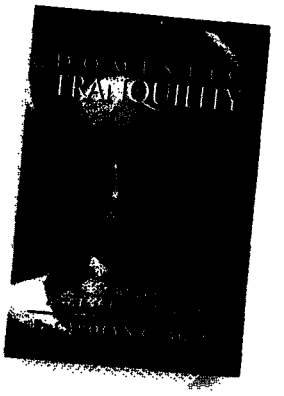

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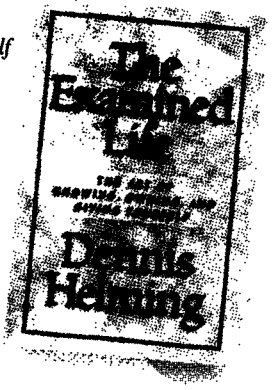

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